

Figuring Desire
Psychoanalytic perspectives on the discourse surrounding
Colin McCahon and Ralph Hotere

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0.1 Abstract

This thesis presents an interweaving of the discourse surrounding Colin McCahon and Ralph Hotere, the philosophy of art, and Lacanian psychoanalysis. In so doing, a Lacanian understanding of subjectivity, painting, discourse, and their interrelationships is elaborated in order to generate some new perspectives on, specifically, the work of McCahon and Hotere, and related writing and testimony, and more generally, the practice of art history and art criticism in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In the first place, this project explains, develops, and applies a Lacanian model of subjectivity/meaning-making understood in terms of the *figuring of desire*. This formula models expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making in terms of the reciprocity obtaining between the agent-like, metaphoric *precipitation* and automatist, metonymic *perpetuation* of symptomatic formations or *points de capiton* in discourses of desire. Secondly, this study analyses the discourse comprising paintings by McCahon and Hotere, and related writing, from the perspective of two *points de capiton* – the key features of which are gathered under the rubrics ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’. The thesis demonstrates that these two formations enliven the possibility of interpreting McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse, respectively, in terms of repeated and contradictory characterisations of McCahon as a visionary *and* a doubter, and of Hotere as eloquent *and* reticent. Furthermore, the thesis shows how, by virtue of their fixation on the symptomatic formations ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’, respectively, McCahon and Hotere discourses bear witness to radically contingent affirmations of, or leaps of faith in, *praxes of contradiction*, thereby sustaining fantasies of the revelation of the reality and truth of the being and meaning of art subjects and art objects. The impossibility of objectively realising these fantasies testifies to the status of subjective desire as that which seeks only its own perpetuation or that finds fulfilment in endlessly missing its aim and, by the same token, in Lacanian terms, underscores the (structural and ethical) necessity of subjectively *being in and as traversing fantasy*.

Contents

0.1	Abstract	ii
0.2	Acknowledgements	x
0.3	List of Figures and Image References	
0.3.1	Figures	xi
0.3.2	Image references	xiii
0.3.3	Illustrations	xxxi

Introduction and Prologue

0.4	Introduction: figuring a thesis, context and structure	
0.4.1	Figuring a thesis	2
0.4.2	Positioning a thesis	3
0.4.3	Structuring a thesis: chapter summary	25
0.5	Introduction: desiring a thesis, motivation and methodology	
0.5.1	Desiring a thesis	32
0.5.2	Fantatising a thesis and traversing the fantasy	34
0.5.3	Aiming a thesis: traversing the fantasies of the traditionalising mode of art history and art criticism	46
0.6	Prologue: the Lacanian orders	
0.6.1	The psychoanalytic triad of imaginary, symbolic, and real	50
0.6.2	Imaginary	51
0.6.3	Symbolic	53
0.6.4	Real	55

Part 1 Subjectivity

1	An other painting: on the nature of the subjectivity expressed in <i>Victory over Death 2</i> , <i>Painting from “Malady”</i> , and related works	
1.1	I declaimed and O exclaimed: differently ambiguous subjectivities in <i>Victory over Death 2</i> and <i>Painting from “Malady”</i>	

1.1.1	<i>Victory over Death 2</i>	67
1.1.2	<i>Painting from “Malady”</i>	70
1.2	Subjectivity as <i>transindividual otherness</i>	
1.2.1	The transindividual and other discourse of painting	74
1.2.2	Reference and resemblance	79
1.3	Sourcing the script of subjectivity	
1.3.1	Painted texts	87
1.3.2	Many texts in one painting	89
1.3.3	Many subjects in one text	97
1.3.4	Texts in translation	104
1.4	Painting the gift of meaning	
1.4.1	The gift of meaning	115
1.4.2	Painting <i>in principle</i> and <i>in possibility</i>	119
2	An other meaning: subjectivity, the unconscious, and language	
2.1	An other meaning: the unconscious and language	
2.1.1	An other meaning: subjectivity as agency <i>and</i> automatism	125
2.1.2	The unconscious in consciousness: ‘discontinuity’ and ‘vacillation’	126
2.1.3	The unconscious as the Other’s discourse and the unconscious as structured like a language	130
2.2	Structuring the dream-work: condensation and displacement of representatives of the representation	
2.2.1	<i>Vorstellungsrepräsentanz</i> : the word, the thing, and the signifier	134
2.2.2	Condensation and displacement; metaphor and metonymy	139
2.3	Meaning-in-the-making: the signifier and signifying chain; meaning repression/overdetermination	
2.3.1	Sign, signifier, signified: Lacan’s subversion of Saussure’s linguistics	145

2.3.2	Meaning/forms and meaning <i>in potentia</i> : the signifier and the signifying chain	154
2.3.3	The psychical function of meaning repression/overdetermination	158
2.4	The meaning that is made: metaphor, metonymy, and the <i>point de capiton</i>	
2.4.1	Metaphors and metonyms	162
2.4.2	The <i>point de capiton</i>	164

Part 2 Painting

3	The figuring of painting	
3.1	' <i>I believe but don't believe</i> ': the 'true' enunciation of painting	
3.1.1	Painting negation	178
3.1.2	Painting, speaking, writing	181
3.2	The <i>figuring</i> of painting	
3.2.1	The materialisation of the signifier	191
3.2.2	The <i>instance</i> of the letter	194
3.2.3	Writing in the real: the letter and the unary trait	198
3.2.4	The figuring of painting	202
3.3	Figuring painted matter	
3.3.1	Figuring the space of meaning	206
3.3.2	Figuring the grammar of form	212
4	The desire of painting	
4.1	Metonymy: meaning the same again	
4.1.1	Metonymy as repetition	221
4.1.2	Identity and difference	228
4.2	Moments of repetition in the <i>Malady</i> series and in <i>Painting from "Malady"</i>	
4.2.1	The metonymy of painting	232
4.2.2	Moments of repetition in the <i>Malady</i> series	235

4.2.3	Moments of repetition in <i>Painting from “Malady”</i>	241
4.3	No beginning and no end: the metonymy of desire	
4.3.1	The Other’s desire and significant insistence	248
4.3.2	The primordially lost origin of desire	254
4.3.3	The circulation of desire	258
4.3.4	The irreducible residue of desire	262

Part 3 Discourse

5	Figuring desire	
5.1	Figuring discourse: AM, I, one	
5.1.1	Zepke, Brown, and <i>Victory over Death 2</i>	280
5.1.2	Zepke, Curnow, and <i>I one</i>	288
5.2	Desiring discourse: circumnavigating the <i>Malady</i> series	
5.2.1	Desiring discourses: the <i>Malady</i> series and the discourse of art history	295
5.2.2	Circumnavigating the <i>Malady</i> series	299
5.3	Figuring desire: McCahon’s doubt, Hotere’s reticence	
5.3.1	Preliminary considerations of the <i>points de capiton</i> ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’	307
5.3.2	Defining the <i>points de capiton</i> ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’	311
6	McCahon’s doubt and Hotere’s reticence	
6.1	The figure of McCahon’s doubt in McCahon discourse	
6.1.1	Brasch	321
6.1.2	Keith, McNamara	323
6.1.3	Curnow	325
6.1.4	Brown	328
6.1.5	Pound	330
6.1.6	Simmons	334
6.1.7	Butler	341

6.2	The figure of Hotere's reticence in Hotere discourse	
6.2.1	McNamara	348
6.2.2	Collier	350
6.2.3	Young, Middleditch	352
6.2.4	Hall	356
6.2.5	Leech	360
6.2.6	Wedde	365
6.2.7	Pound	369
6.3	Praxes of contradiction: McCahon's vision of doubt and Hotere's eloquent reticence	
6.3.1	The vision of doubt: McCahon's questioning faith	374
6.3.2	Eloquent reticence: Hotere's effecting discursive silence	385
7	Conclusion	398
8	Appendices	
8.1	Barrie, Zepke, and the question of Lacanian phallogocentrism	
8.1.1	Barrie	403
8.1.2	Zepke	405
8.1.3	Lacanian phallogocentrism	407
8.2	Lacan, Heidegger, and Derrida: comparisons and key ideas	411
8.2.1	Other fantasies in the discursive field: ontotheology and logocentrism	412
8.2.2	Another Other: Derrida's archive	416
8.2.3	The transcendental signified	418
8.2.4	Trace and <i>différance</i>	420
8.2.5	Ek-sistence and <i>ekstasis</i>	423
8.2.6	The real Thing	424
8.2.7	<i>Dasein</i> : being possible	426
8.3	'Influence' and 'agency'	429
8.3.1	McCahon discourse: Leech and Pound	430
8.3.2	Hotere discourse: O'Brien and Baker	434

8.4	Unconscious <i>structure</i> versus unconscious <i>process</i>	439
8.4.1	The Freudian view	439
8.4.2	The Lacanian view	441
8.5	Freud's conception of primary and secondary processes	
8.5.1	The human psyche as a homeostasis	445
8.5.2	Basic functioning of the psychical apparatus	446
8.5.3	Mediation of the primary process by the secondary process	447
8.5.4	Relationship of primary and secondary processes to the psychical systems <i>Ucs.</i> and <i>Pcs.</i>	449
8.5.5	Repression as a function of the primary and secondary processes	450
8.5.6	Freud's first psychical topography of <i>Ucs.</i> , <i>Pcs.</i> , and <i>Cs.</i>	452
8.6	Saussure's conception of the linguistic sign and linguistic value	
8.6.1	Saussure's definition of the linguistic sign	456
8.6.2	The concrete indeterminacy of the linguistic sign	456
8.6.3	The ideal identity and relative difference of the linguistic sign	459
8.7	Freud's conception of the 'compulsion to repeat' and the 'death instinct' in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'	
8.7.1	The limits of the pleasure principle	464
8.7.2	The compulsion to repeat and the death instinct	466
8.8	Repression and exclusion: the primordial origin of subjectivity	
8.8.1	The Freudian distinction between <i>Verdrängung</i> and, respectively, <i>Urverdrängung</i> , <i>Verwerfung</i> , and <i>Bejahung/Ausstossung</i>	469
8.8.2	Lacan's transformation of Freud	473
8.8.3	Žižek's transformation of Lacan	477
8.9	Tracing <i>Malady</i> series acrylic paintings on canvas from 1970	
8.9.1	Numbered and/or lettered works	480
8.9.2	Un-numbered and/or un-lettered works	485
8.9.3	No data	486
8.10	Evaluating Hotere's 'institutional neglect'	488

9	Bibliography	
9.1	Material pertaining to Colin McCahon	
9.1.1	Books	492
9.1.2	Essays, articles, book chapters, exhibition pamphlets and other print media	493
9.1.3	Theses and unpublished materials	497
9.1.4	Electronic resources	497
9.2	Material pertaining to Ralph Hotere	
9.2.1	Books	497
9.2.2	Essays, articles, book chapters, exhibition pamphlets and other print media	498
9.2.3	Theses and unpublished materials	501
9.2.4	Electronic resources	501
9.3	Art, culture, literature	
9.3.1	Books	502
9.3.2	Essays, articles, book chapters, and other print media	505
9.3.3	Electronic resources	506
9.4	Psychoanalysis, philosophy, linguistics, art theory, aesthetics, theology, literary and cultural theory	
9.4.1	Books	508
9.4.2	Essays, articles, book chapters, and other print media	515
9.4.3	Electronic resources	522

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0.3 List of Figures and Image References

This thesis mentions many works by McCahon and Hotere. However, in order to keep copyright permissions at a manageable level, I reproduce only a small number of works addressed in detail. With a few exceptions, these are limited to McCahon's 'written paintings' of 1969 and 1970, as shown in the exhibition *Colin McCahon Recent Paintings, Victory Over Death or Practical Religion* (1970), and examples of Hotere's *Malady* series paintings, as shown in the exhibitions *Black Paintings 1970 – Malady Series* (1970) and *Ralph Hotere, Malady* (1970). For other works, of more tangential or ancillary interest, I provide references to online and print reproductions. Figures and image references to works by McCahon include links to the most comprehensive source available: the *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, administered by the Colin McCahon Research and Publication Trust in conjunction with Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tāmaki. These works are also identified with a unique 'cm' number. At the time of writing, no equivalent resource exists for works by Hotere – although, the lavishly produced *Ralph Hotere* (2008) contains over two hundred, excellent quality, colour reproductions of many key works, thereby constituting the most definitive Hotere image reference to date.

0.3.1 Figures

- 01 Colin McCahon, *Victory over Death 2* (cm001502, February 1970, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 2075 x 5977 mm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001502>, (11.06.14). Image from Marja Bloem and Martin Browne, *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum and Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing, 2002), 110-11.
- 02 Colin McCahon, *Practical Religion, the resurrection of Lazarus showing Mount Martha* (cm001019, December 1969 – February 1970, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 2075 x 8070 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*,

<http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001019>, (11.06.14). Image from *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 108-09.

- 03 Ralph Hotere, *Painting from “Malady”* (1970, acrylic on canvas, 1116 x 912 mm, Jennifer Gibbs Trust Collection). Image from Ralph Hotere, Kriselle Baker and Vincent O’Sullivan, *Ralph Hotere* (Auckland: Ron Sang Publications, 2008), 60.
- 04 Colin McCahon, *I one* (cm001358, 27 August 1959, enamel on hardboard, 1218 x 609 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001358> (11.06.14). Image from Peter Simpson, *Colin McCahon, The Titirangi Years, 1953-59* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), 145.
- 05 Ralph Hotere, *Portrait – Bill Manhire* (1971, mixed media on paper, 312 x 266 mm, private collection). Image from Bill Manhire, *Selected Poems* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2012), 2. See also *Landfall 191*, new series, v4, i1, March 1996, front cover.
- 06 Colin McCahon, *The Lark’s Song (a poem by Matire Kereama)* (cm001360, August – October 1969, synthetic polymer paint on two hardboard panels, 1626 x 1980 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001360>, (11.06.14). Image from *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 105.
- 07 Ralph Hotere, *Darkness Settles Down* (1972, acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 1220 mm, Chris and Dayle Mace Collection). Image from *Ralph Hotere*, 67.
- 08 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting XII from “Malady”* (1970, acrylic on canvas, 1775 x 915 mm, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago). See Otago University Research Heritage online,

<http://otago.ourheritage.ac.nz/items/show/5422>, (20.02.15). Image from *Ralph Hotere*, 55.

- 09 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting XV from "Malady"* (1970, acrylic on canvas, 1777 x 915 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa). See Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/Object/36543>, (11.06.14). Image from *Ralph Hotere*, 54.
- 10 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting XIIB from "Malady"* (1970, acrylic on canvas, 1775 x 915 mm, Fide Trust, Christchurch). Image from *Ralph Hotere*, 57. See also Artnet.com, http://www.artnet.com/artists/ralph-hotere/black-painting-xiib-from-malady-I2jclabjqnOTbLZ3Be_Ong2, (23.02.15).

0.3.2 Image references

- 01 René Magritte, *The Two Mysteries* (1966, oil on canvas, 650 x 800 mm, private collection). See Siegfried Gohr, *Magritte: Attempting the Impossible* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 2009), 116.
- 02 Colin McCahon, *Te Tangi o Te Pipiwhararua (The Song of the Shining Cuckoo)* cm001609, October 1974, synthetic polymer paint on five, unstretched canvases, each approximately 1750 x 900 mm, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001609>, (13.03.15). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 127.
- 03 Colin McCahon, *Takaka: night and day* (cm001361, July 1948, oil on canvas on board, 915 x 2130 mm, Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000828>, (05.03.15). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 174.

- 04 Colin McCahon, *On building bridges (triptych)* (cm000010, July – September 1952, oil on three hardboard panels, total dimensions 1067 x 2745 mm, Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000010>, (05.03.15). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 34.
- 05 Colin McCahon, *The days and nights in the wilderness showing the constant flow of light passing through the wall of death* (cm000621, April – June 1971, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 2350 x 1842 mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000621>, (05.03.15). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 117.
- 06 Colin McCahon, *Victory over Death 2*.
- 07 Colin McCahon, *The Angel of the Annunciation* (cm001039, April 1947, oil on cardboard, 647 x 521 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongawera). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001039>, (10.03.15). See also Laurence Simmons, *The image always has the last word* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2002), 70.
- 08 Colin McCahon, *Hail Mary* (cm001221, December 1947 – March 1948, oil on canvas, 935 x 890 mm, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001221>, (10.03.15). See also Simmons, 71.
- 09 Colin McCahon, *Annunciation* (cm000630, July – November 1949, oil on cardboard, 654 x 520 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000630>, (10.03.15). See also Simmons, 71.

- 10 Titian, *The Entombment* (1559, oil on canvas, 1360 x 1745 mm, Prado Museum, Madrid). See Museo Nacional Del Prado Galería online, <https://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/galeria-on-ine/galeria-on-line/obra/entierro-de-cristo/>, (14.03.15). See also Simmons, 67.
- 11 Colin McCahon, *Entombment (after Titian)* (cm001089, oil on cardboard, 515 x 635 mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001089>, (14.03.15). See also Simmons, 66.
- 12 Colin McCahon, *Entombment (after Titian)* (cm001034, January – May 1947, oil on cardboard mounted on hardboard, 517 x 644 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa). See Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/Object/44138>, (11.06.14). See also Simmons, 66.
- 13 Colin McCahon, *Practical Religion, the resurrection of Lazarus showing Mount Martha*.
- 14 Ralph Hotere, *4 + 4* (1996, metallic oxides on glass, gold leaf, gold dust, window frame, 1000 x 900 mm, Bornholdt Family Collection). See *Ralph Hotere*, 274.
- 15 Ralph Hotere, *Painting from “Malady”*.
- 16 Colin McCahon, *I Am* (cm000828, February 1954, oil on jute canvas, 361 x 555 mm, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000828>, (11.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 80.
- 17 Colin McCahon, *Gate III* (cm001186, November – December 1970, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 3050 x 10670 mm, Victoria University of Wellington Art Collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*,

<http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001186>, (11.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 214.

- 18 Colin McCahon, *I one*.
- 19 Colin McCahon, *One* (cm000418, May – July 1965, synthetic polymer paint on hardboard, 607 x 607 mm, National Gallery of Australia, Melbourne). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000418>, (11.06.14). See also Colin McCahon, *I will need words: Colin McCahon's word and number paintings*, exh. cat. (Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1984), np.
- 20 Colin McCahon, *Upper corners off, the second large gate* (cm001017, April 1961, enamel on hardboard, 1524 x 1218 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001017>, (11.06.14).
- 21 Colin McCahon, *Gate, Waioneke* (cm001041, March – May 1961, enamel on hardboard, 1798 x 1220 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001041>, (11.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 90.
- 22 Colin McCahon, *Waioneke* (cm001040, May 1961, enamel on hardboard, 1812 x 1195 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001040>, (11.06.14).
- 23 Colin McCahon, *Here I give thanks to Mondrian* (cm000676, March 1961, enamel on hardboard, 1215 x 915 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000676>, (11.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 91.

- 24 Colin McCahon, *The Second Gate Series* (cm001001, 1962, enamel on hardboard, sixteen panels, 1208 x 12505 mm in total, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001001>, (11.06.14). See also Peter Simpson, *Answering Hark, McCahon/Caselberg, Painter/Poet* (Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing, 2001), 70-71.
- 25 Colin McCahon, *Waterfall* (cm000452, November 1964, oil on hardboard, 304 x 300 mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000452>, (11.06.14).
- 26 Colin McCahon, *The days and nights in the wilderness showing the constant flow of light passing into a dark landscape* (cm001226, April – June 1971, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 2360 x 1840 mm, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001226>, (11.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 116.
- 27 Colin McCahon, *Light falling through a dark landscape* (cm001250, October 1971, charcoal on paper, 452 x 598 mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001250> (11.06.14).
- 28 Colin McCahon, *Urewera mural* (cm001411, synthetic polymer paint on three, unstretched canvases, each 2158 x 1820 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, on loan from the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001411> (11.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 223.
- 29 Colin McCahon, *A Letter to Hebrews* (cm001038, October 1979, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 1870 x 2406 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*,

<http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001038>, (11.06.14). See also Gordon H. Brown, *Towards a Promised Land: on the life and art of Colin McCahon* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2010), 173.

- 30 Colin McCahon, *Is there anything of which one can say, look this is new?* (cm001300, March 1982, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 1955 x 1810 mm, Bank of New Zealand Collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001300> (11.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 153.
- 31 Ralph Hotere, *Untitled* (1967, enamel on board, 600 x 600 mm, Farmer Collection). See *Ralph Hotere*, 16.
- 32 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting* (1969, acrylic on canvas, 1015 x 915 mm, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu). See Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, <http://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/collection/objects/69-631/>, (11.06.14). See also *Ralph Hotere*, 41.
- 33 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting* (1970, acrylic on canvas, 1815 x 1368 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa). See Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/Object/318352>, (11.06.14). See also Dunedin Public Art Gallery and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongawera, *Ralph Hotere: Black Light, Major works including collaborations with Bill Culbert*, exh. cat. (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2000), 81.
- 34 Ralph Hotere, *Port Chalmers Painting No.10* (1972, acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 1220 mm, Jennifer Gibbs Trust Collection, Auckland). See James Ross (ed), *New Zealand Modernism – The Content of Form, Paintings from The Gibbs Collection* (Auckland: The Gibbs Collection, 1997), 57.

- 35 Ralph Hotere, *Requiem for Tony* (1974, lacquer on hardboard, 1520 x 1220 mm, Paris Family Collection). See *Ralph Hotere*, 80.
- 36 Ralph Hotere, *Godwit/Kuaka* (1977, lacquer on hardboard, 2400 x 18000 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, <http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/the-collection/browse-artwork/8535/godwit-kuaka>, (11.06.14). See also *Ralph Hotere*, 114.
- 37 Ralph Hotere, *No Ordinary Sun* (1984, acrylic on hardboard, 1560 x 1180 mm, Jennifer Gibbs Trust Collection). See *Ralph Hotere*, 253.
- 38 Ralph Hotere, *Portrait – Bill Manhire* (1971, ink and water colour wash on paper, dimensions unknown, whereabouts unknown). See Bill Manhire and Ralph Hotere, *The Elaboration* (Wellington: Square and Circle, 1972), 8.
- 39 Ralph Hotere, *Portrait – Bill Manhire*.
- 40 Ralph Hotere, *Drawing of Bill Manhire* (1972, ink on paper, 350 x 290 mm, private collection). See Gregory O’Brien, *Hotere, Out The Black Window, Ralph Hotere’s work with New Zealand poets* (Auckland: Godwit Publishing, 1997), 61.
- 41 Vincent van Gogh, *Flowering Plum Tree (after Hiroshige)* (September – October 1887, oil on canvas, 550 x 460 mm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam). See The Vincent van Gogh Gallery online, http://www.vggallery.com/painting/p_0371.htm, (12.06.14). See also, Susan Alyson Stein (ed), *Van Gogh, A Retrospective* (New York: Park Lane, 1986), 114.
- 42 Utagawa Hiroshige, *The Plum Garden at Kameido* (1856-59, woodblock print, 377 x 265 mm, various collections). See Brooklyn Museum, Hiroshige’s One Hundred Famous Views of Edo online, <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/research/>

[edo/detail.php?view=toc.30&total=118](#), (12.06.14). See also Matthi Forrer, Suzuki Jūzō, and Henry D. Smith II, *Hiroshige, Prints and Drawings*, exh. cat. (Munich and New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), catalogue number 93.

- 43 Colin McCahon, *Jump E19, To Tomioka Tessai* (cm000946, 1974, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched jute canvas, 926 x 590 mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000946>, (11.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 119.
- 44 Colin McCahon, *If a man walks after nightfall* (cm001525, April 1969, synthetic polymer paint on hardboard, 605 x 605 mm, private collection. Image from *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001525>, (11.06.14).
- 45 Colin McCahon, *The Lark's Song*.
- 46 Ralph Hotere, *Darkness Settles Down*.
- 47 Ralph Hotere, *Me Tangi Ko Te Mate I Te Marama* (1972, acrylic and ink on paper, 525 x 422 mm, whereabouts unknown). See *Mutual Art.com*, <http://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Me-Tangi-Kapa-Ko-Te-Mate-I-Te-Marama---T/3800D288FCB75921>, (11.06.14).
- 48 Colin McCahon, *O let us weep* (cm001590, April 1969, synthetic polymer paint on four hardboard panels, each 610 x 609 mm, Bank of New Zealand Collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001590>, (11.06.14).
- 49 Ralph Hotere, *Hone Tuwhare's 'Not by Wind Ravaged'* (1972, acrylic and ink on paper, 525 x 425 mm, whereabouts unknown). See *Artnet*, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/ralph-hotere/te-whiti-from-hone-tuwhares-not-by-wind-ravaged-PJw1NXBKMgOutkZNSzZHcg2>, (20.02.14).

- 50 Ralph Hotere, *Te Whiti: From John Caselberg's 'The Voice of the Maori'* (1972, acrylic and ink on paper, 490 x 365 mm, private collection, Auckland). See Te Miringa Hohaia, Gregory O'Brien and Lara Strongman (eds), *Parihaka, The Art of Passive Resistance*, exh. cat. (Wellington: City Gallery, Wellington and Victoria University Press, 2001), 125.
- 51 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting XII from "Malady"*.
- 52 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting XV from "Malady"*.
- 53 Ralph Hotere, *Malady Malady Malady* (1970, watercolour on paper, 760 x 560 mm, whereabouts unknown). Image from John Furphy, *Australian Art Sales Digest* online, <http://www.aasd.com.au/index.cfm/search-title/?q=malady+malady+malady&Submit=Search+for+Title&q= &qw= &house= &medium=0&sold=2&lo= &hi= &loe= &hie= &height= &width= &loy= &hiy>, (12.06.14).
- 54 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting from "Malady"* (1970, acrylic on canvas, 2115 x 740 mm, Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt). See Emma Bugden, 'We Remember Ralph Hotere', Dowse Art Museum, <http://dowse.org.nz/news/blog/2013/we-remember-ralph-hotere>, 24 February, 2013 (20.02.15). See also *Ralph Hotere*, 58.
- 55 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting III from "Malady"* (1970, dye and acrylic on canvas, 1800 x 1240 mm, Te Manawa Museum of Art, Science and History, Palmerston North). Image available by request from Te Manawa internal database.
- 56 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting IIIa from "Malady"* (1970, acrylic on canvas, 1681 x 1376 mm, Te Manawa Museum of Art, Science and History, Palmerston North). Image available by request from Te Manawa internal database.

- 57 Ralph Hotere, *Malady Panels* (1971, acrylic on canvas, seven panels, each approx 1780 x 1065 mm in total, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu). See Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, <http://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/collection/objects/79-3881-7/>, (11.06.14). See also *Ralph Hotere*, 50-51.
- 58 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting XVII from "Malady"* (1970, acrylic on canvas, 1780 x 915 mm, private collection). See *Ralph Hotere*, 56.
- 59 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting XI from "Malady"* (1970, acrylic on canvas, 1795 x 935 mm, private collection). See *Ralph Hotere*, 52.
- 60 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting XIV from "Malady"* (1970, acrylic on canvas, 1780 x 915 mm, private collection). See *Ralph Hotere*, 53.
- 61 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting XIIB from "Malady"*.
- 62 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting XIII from "Malady"* (1970, acrylic on canvas, 1776 x 914 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa). See Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/Object/38756>, (12.06.14).
- 63 Ralph Hotere, *February, May and the Birds of Ice. The Moon Drowns in its Voices of Water* (1970, pigment dyes on alkyd resin on canvas, four panels, each 3050 x 1525 mm, Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Image available on request from Dunedin Public Art Gallery internal database.
- 64 Ralph Hotere, *Working Painting for Big Panel* (1970, pigment and dye on canvas, 1775 x 910 mm). See Webb's, *Important Works of Art*, (c. 2009), np, <http://www.webbs.co.nz/node/77555>, (27.11.13).

- 65 Ralph Hotere, *O For Love* (1970, dye and enamel on canvas, 1760 x 910 mm, Farmer Collection). See *Ralph Hotere*, 61.
- 66 Colin McCahon, *Are there not twelve hours of daylight* (cm000011, February 1970, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 2077 x 2580 mm, Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000011>, (11.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 115.
- 67 Colin McCahon, *A question of faith* (cm000015, February 1970, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 2080 x 2615 mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000015>, (11.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 113.
- 68 Colin McCahon, *This day a man is* (cm001515, February 1970, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 2070 x 2608 mm, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001515>, 11.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 114.
- 69 Colin McCahon, *A grain of wheat* (cm001022, February 1970, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 2080 x 3435 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001022>, (11.06.14). See also Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/Object/42098>, (11.06.14).
- 70 Colin McCahon, *James 3, Practical Religion* (cm001625, 13 October 1969, synthetic polymer paint on hardboard, 600 x 600 mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001625>, (11.06.14).

- 71 Colin McCahon, *Victory over Death* (cm000661, 10 October 1969, synthetic polymer paint on hardboard, 610 x 610 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000661>, (11.06.14). See also Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki <http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/the-collection/browse-artwork/6182/victory-over-death>, (11.06.14).
- 72 Colin McCahon, *Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but we shall go and wake him* (cm001626, 13-14 October 1969, synthetic polymer paint on hardboard, 600 x 600 mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001626>, (11.06.14).
- 73 Colin McCahon, *Easter Morning* (cm000662, February-April 1950, oil on jute canvas, 712 x 920 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000662>, (11.06.14).
- 74 Colin McCahon, *The Marys at the Tomb* (cm000669, January-March 1950, oil on canvas on board, 806 x 1054 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000669>, (11.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 74.
- 75 Colin McCahon, *Comet (F1, F2, F3)* (cm000244, 1974, synthetic polymer paint on three, unstretched, jute canvases, dimensions unknown, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000244>, (08.12.14).
- 76 Colin McCahon, *Comet (F4, F5, F6, F7)* (cm001526, 1974, synthetic polymer painting on four, unstretched, jute canvases, 930 x 388 mm, 930 x 405 mm, 930 x 460 mm, 930 x 385 mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001526>, (08.12.14).

- 77 Colin McCahon, *Comet (F8, F9, F10)* (cm000672, 1974, synthetic polymer paint on three, unstretched, jute canvases, 930 x 508 mm, 930 x 500 mm, 930 x 623mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000672>, (08.12.14).
- 78 Colin McCahon, *Comet (F11)* (cm001562, 1974, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched, jute canvas, 920 x 620 mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001562>, (08.12.14).
- 79 Colin McCahon, *Comet (F12)* (cm000309, 1974, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched, jute canvas, 909 x 514 mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000309>, (08.12.14).
- 80 Colin McCahon, *I Paul to you at Ngatimoti* (cm000666, 1946, oil on cardboard on plywood, 505 x 635 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000666>, (21.02.15). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 67.
- 81 Colin McCahon, *Crucifixion according to St. Mark* (cm001062, October 1947, oil on canvas on board, 800 x 1095 mm, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001062>, (12.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 69.
- 82 Colin McCahon, *The Promised Land* (cm000668, February – August 1948, oil on canvas, 920 x 1370 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000668>, (21.02.15). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 71.

- 83 Colin McCahon, *Rustic bird roost for vultures* (cm000977, 1973, charcoal on paper, 300 x 258mm, Te Manawa Art Society, Inc. See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000977>, (08.12.14).
- 84 Colin McCahon, *Work towards the first stations of the Cross* (cm000299, 1973, conte crayon on paper, 301 x 459mm, whereabouts unknown). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000299>, (08.12.14).
- 85 Colin McCahon, *Teaching Aids 2 (June)* (cm000004, June 1975, synthetic polymer paint on ten sheets of paper, each 1092 x 728mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, on loan from a private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000004>, (08.12.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 128.
- 86 Colin McCahon, *Teaching Aids 2 (July)* (cm001514, July 1975, synthetic polymer paint on ten sheets of paper, each 1092 x 728mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001514>, (08.12.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 129.
- 87 Colin McCahon, *Teaching Aids 3* (cm001347, 1975, synthetic polymer paint on ten sheets of paper, each 1095 x 725mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001347>, (08.12.14). See also Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, <http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/the-collection/browse-artwork/6371/teaching-aids-3>, (08.12.14).
- 88 Colin McCahon, *Moby Dick is sighted off Muriwai Beach* (cm000211, February 1972, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 764 x 1272mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, on loan from a private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000211>, (08.12.14).

- 89 Colin McCahon, *Through the Wall of Death: A Banner* (cm001405, 1972, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 1840 x 2355mm, Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001405>, (08.12.14).
- 90 Colin McCahon, *I applied my mind* (cm001660, 1980-82, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 1950 x 1805mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001660>, (08.12.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 155.
- 91 Colin McCahon, *I considered all the acts of oppression* (cm000169, c.1982, synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 1964 x 1810mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000169>, (08.12.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 157.
- 92 Ralph Hotere, *Sangro Panel* (1962-63, acrylic on board and card, 510 x 510 mm, Dr. Allan Godfrey Collection). See *Ralph Hotere*, 3.
- 93 Ralph Hotere, *Winter Landscape, Sangro River* (1963, acrylic on hardboard, 735 x 960 mm, Dunedin Public Art Gallery). See *Ralph Hotere*, 8.
- 94 Ralph Hotere, *Port Chalmers Painting No. 14* (1972, acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 1220 mm, private collection). See *Ralph Hotere*, 65.
- 95 Ralph Hotere, and *Port Chalmers Painting No. 16* (1972, acrylic on canvas, 1230 x 1236 mm, The Suter Art Gallery, Te Aratoi o Whakatu). See *Ralph Hotere*, 62.
- 96 Ralph Hotere, *Founders Theatre Memorial Mural* (1973, lacquer on hardboard, three panels, 4885 x 1070 mm, 4885 x 7490 mm, 4885 x 1070 mm, Collection of Hamilton City Council Courtesy of Waikato Museum of Art & History Te Whare Taonga o Waikato). See *Ralph Hotere*, 92-93.

- 97 Ralph Hotere, *Black Window* (1983, lacquer on stainless steel and acrylic on hardboard, dimensions unknown, whereabouts unknown). Work is discussed but not illustrated in Peter Leech, 'Style and Change in Ralph Hotere', *Art New Zealand*, n29, Summer 1983-84, 19.
- 98 Ralph Hotere, *Baby Iron* (1983, lacquer on corrugated stainless steel and acrylic on hardboard, dimensions unknown, whereabouts unknown). See Leech, 'Style and Change in Ralph Hotere', 19.
- 99 Ralph Hotere, *Window In Spain* (1978, acrylic on unstretched canvas, 1385 x 900 mm, Dr. Allan Godfrey Collection). See *Ralph Hotere*, 162.
- 100 Ralph Hotere, *Aramoana* (1982, lacquer on corrugated iron and wood, ten pieces, each 3048 x 826 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, <http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/the-collection/browse-artwork/6514/aramoana>, (13.06.14). See also *Ralph Hotere*, 170-71.
- 101 Ralph Hotere, Ralph Hotere, *La Mort a les Couleurs du Paon* (1985, acrylic on unstretched canvas, 1960 x 1810 mm, private collection). See *Ralph Hotere*, 241.
- 102 Ralph Hotere, *Black Paintings* (1968, lacquer on glass, seven panels, each 700 x 245 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa). See Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/Object/252937>, (13.06.14). See also *Ralph Hotere*, 26-27.
- 103 Ralph Hotere, *Black Paintings* (1968, lacquer on hardboard, seven panels, each 1230 x 623 mm, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth). See *Ralph Hotere: Black Light*, 73-79.

- 104 Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting* (1967-68, enamel on four metal panels with perspex, 1750 x 1260 mm in total, Jennifer Gibbs Trust Collection, Auckland). See *New Zealand Modernism – The Content of Form*, 53.
- 105 Colin McCahon, *Elias, Why cannot he save himself* (cm000139, April – August 1959, enamel and sawdust on hardboard, 1475 x 1000 mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000139>, (12.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 83.
- 106 Colin McCahon, *Will he save him?* (000664, June-August 1959, enamel on hardboard, 1220 x 900 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000664>, (12.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 86.
- 107 Colin McCahon, *Was it worthwhile* (000414, August 1959, enamel on hardboard, 672 x 440 mm, private collection). See *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm000414>, (12.06.14). See also *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 84.
- 108 Ralph Hotere, *Black Window Towards Aramoana* (1983, acrylic and lacquer on board, installation utilising eight window frames of various dimensions, now dispersed into various public and private collections). Two of these works are illustrated in Art Gallery of New South Wales, *The Fifth Biennale of Sydney, Private Symbol: Social Metaphor*, exh. cat (Sydney: Biennale of Sydney Ltd., 1984), np. For another reference to the first work, see *Ralph Hotere*, 208, where it is listed as *Black Window – Towards Aramoana* (1983, corrugated stainless steel, acrylic on hardboard, wooden window frame, 1113 x 960 mm, private collection). For another reference to the second work, see *Ralph Hotere: Black Light*, 87, where it is listed as *Black Window, Port Chalmers* (1982, acrylic on hardboard, wooden window frame, 1030 x 970 mm, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago).

- 109 Ralph Hotere and Bill Culbert, *Pathway to the sea – Aramoana* (1991, paua shells, rocks, fluorescent tubes, ~30400 x 1170 x 340 mm (installation size variable), Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa). See Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/Object/41267>, (13.06.14). See also *Ralph Hotere: Black Light*, 95.
- 110 Ralph Hotere and Bill Culbert, *P.R.O.P.* (1991, lacquer on corrugated iron, fluorescent tubes, 3000 x 12000 mm, Dunedin Public Art Gallery). See *Ralph Hotere: Black Light*, 93. See also Waikato Museum, Te Whare Taonga o Waikato, <http://waikatomuseum.co.nz/about-us/news/article/58/>, (22.02.15).
- 111 Ralph Hotere, *Black Phoenix* (1984-88, burnt wood, metal, 5000 x 12900 x 5650 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa). See Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/Object/37093>, (13.06.14). See also *Ralph Hotere*, 198-99.

0.3.3 Illustrations

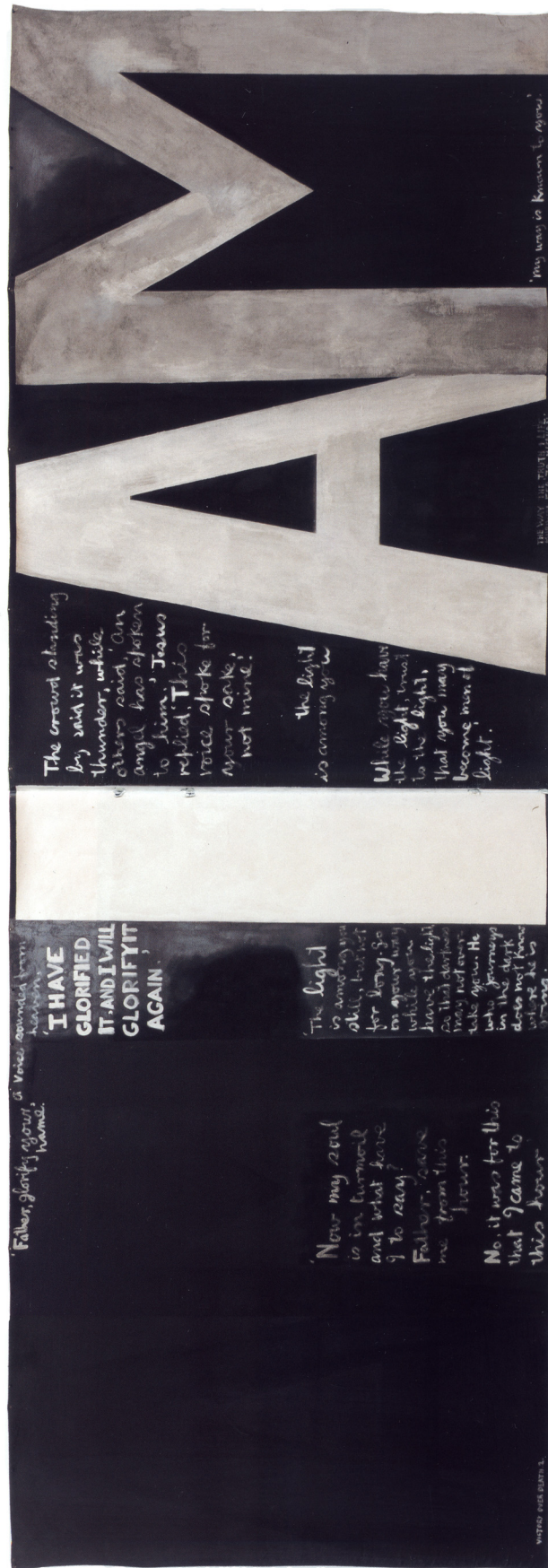


Fig. 1, Colin McCahon, *Victory over Death 2*, 1970

synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 2075 x 5977 mm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
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Fig. 2, Colin McCahon,

Practical Religion: the resurrection of Lazarus showing Mount Martha, 1969-70

synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas, 2075 x 8070 mm, Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa
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Fig. 3, Ralph Hotere, *Painting from "Malady"*, 1970
acrylic on canvas, 1116 x 912 mm, Jennifer Gibbs Trust Collection
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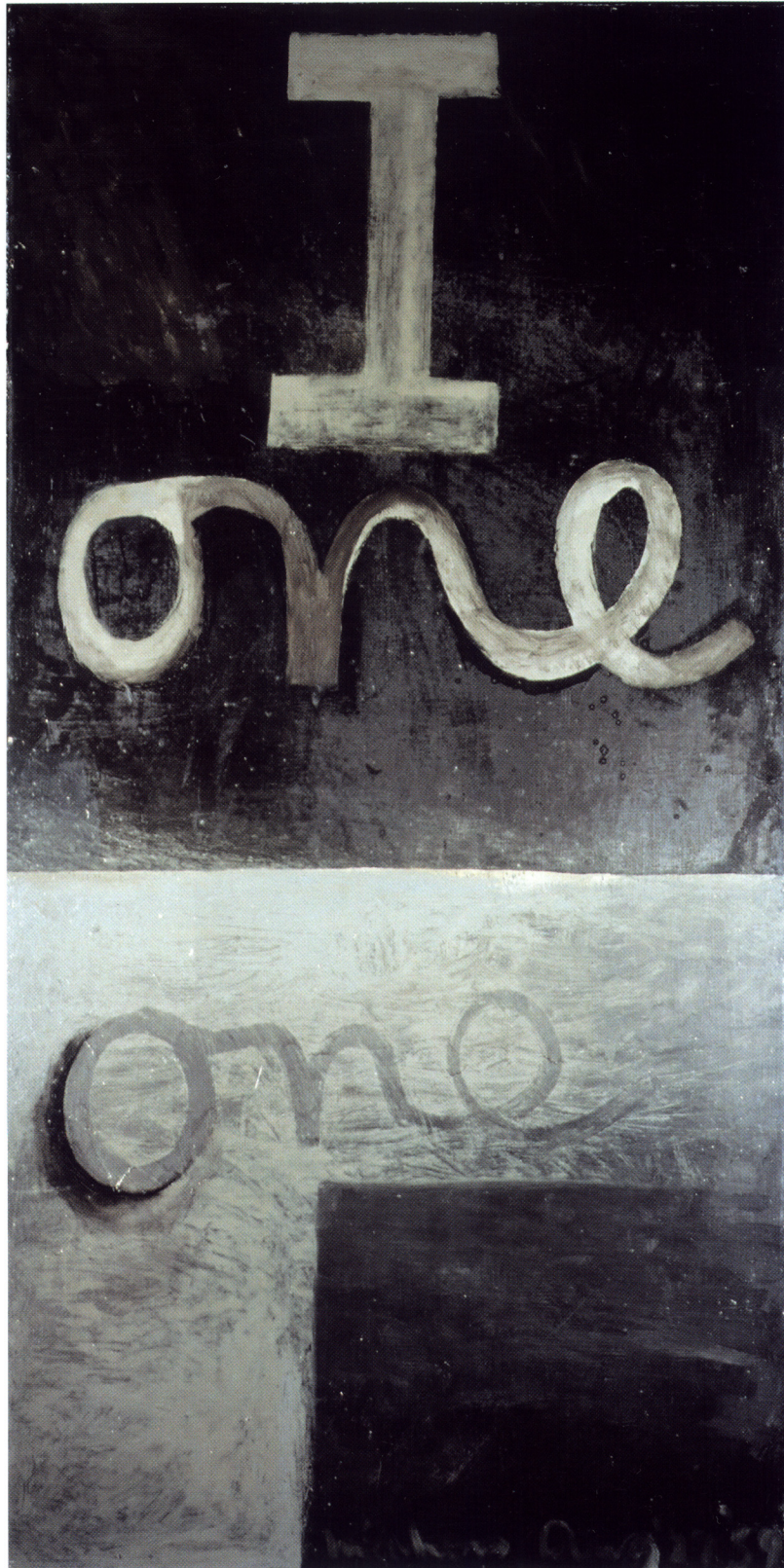


Fig. 4, Colin McCahon, *I one*, 1959

enamel on hardboard, 1218 x 609 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki

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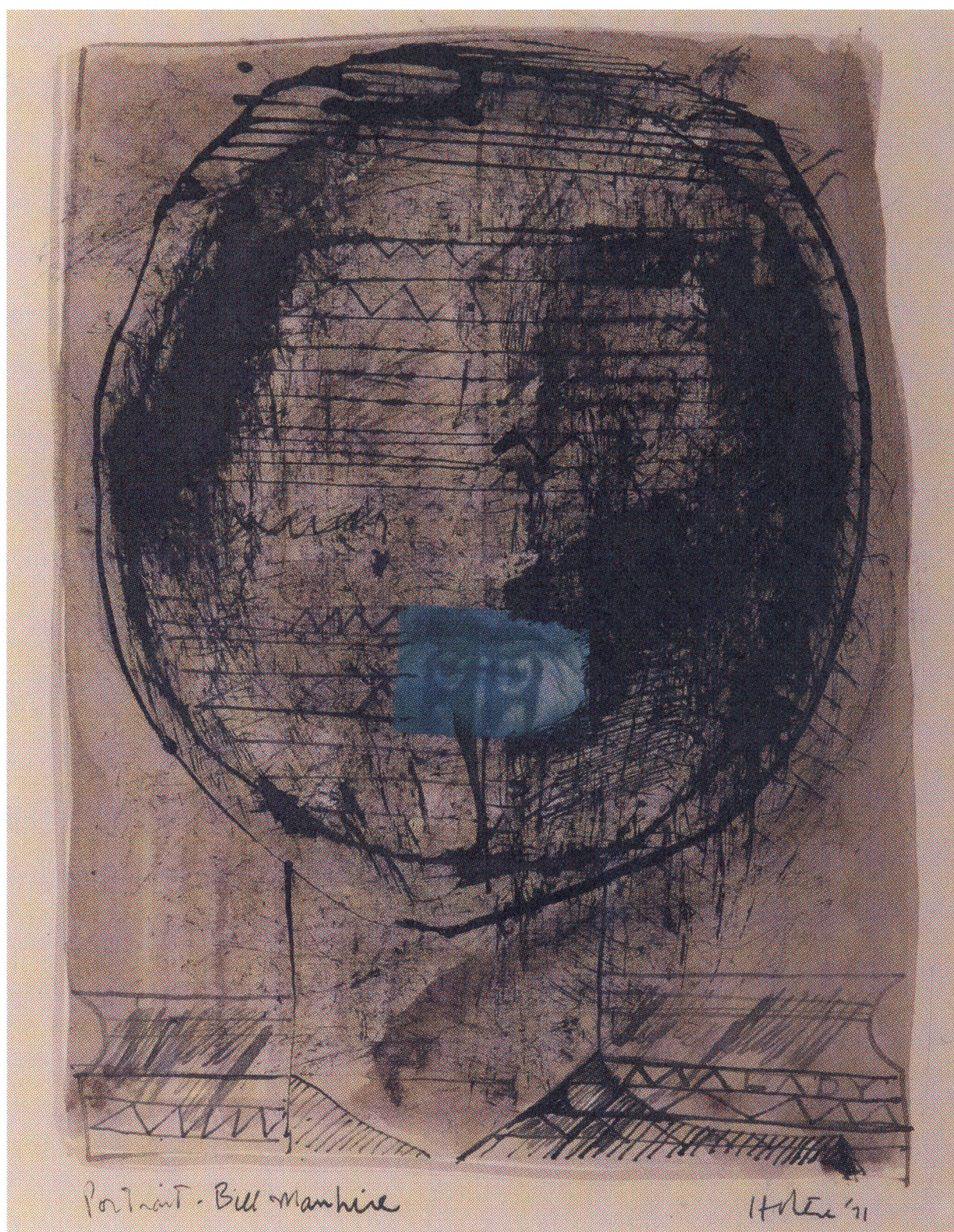


Fig. 5, Ralph Hotere, ***Portrait - Bill Manhire***, 1971

mixed media on paper, 312 x 266 mm, private collection

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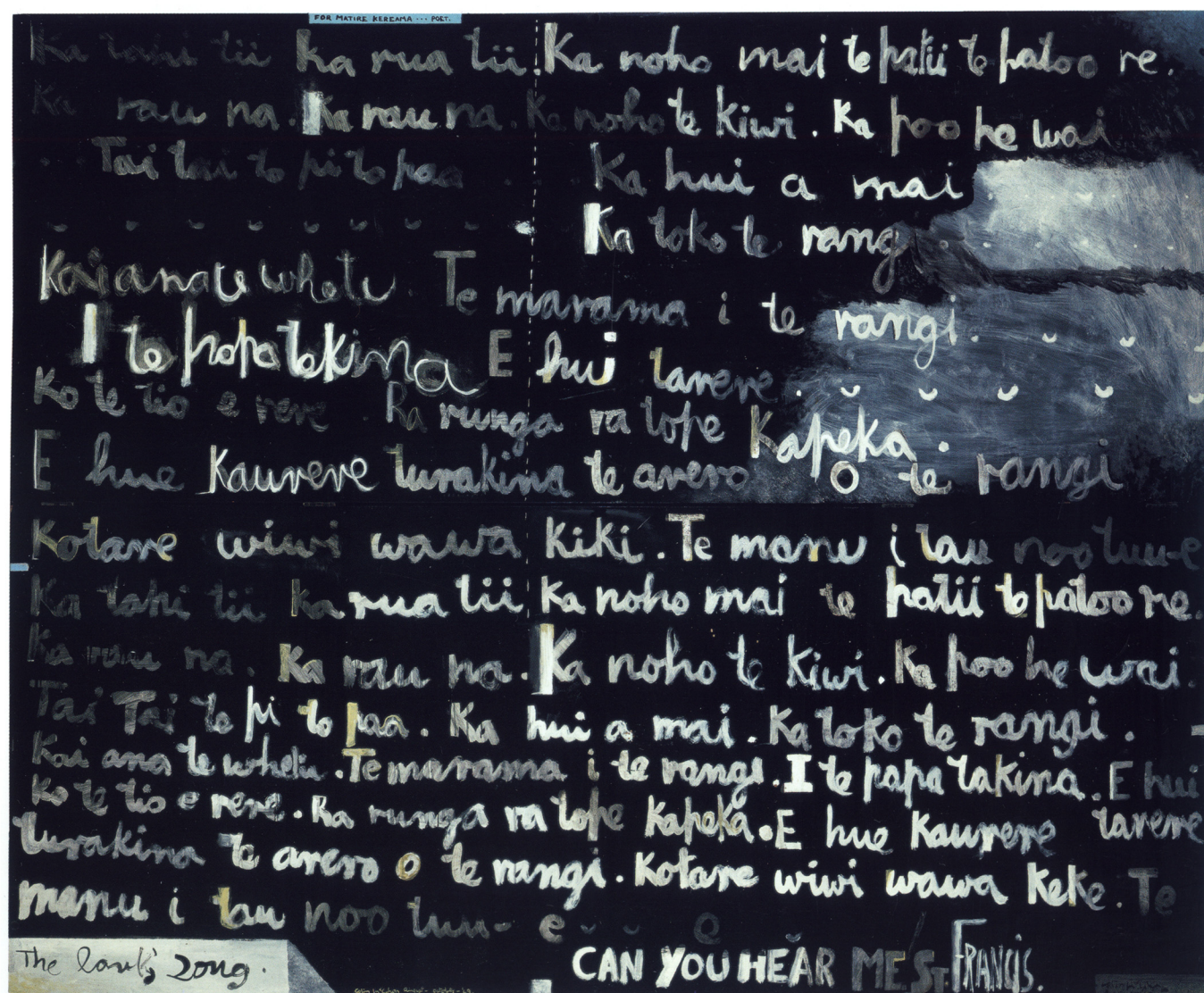


Fig. 6, Colin McCahon,
The Lark's Song (a poem by Matire Kereama), 1969
 synthetic polymer paint on two hardboard panels, 1626 x 1980 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki
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Fig. 7, Ralph Hotere, *Darkness Settles Down*, 1972

acrylic on canvas, 1220 x 1220 mm, Chris and Dale Mace Collection

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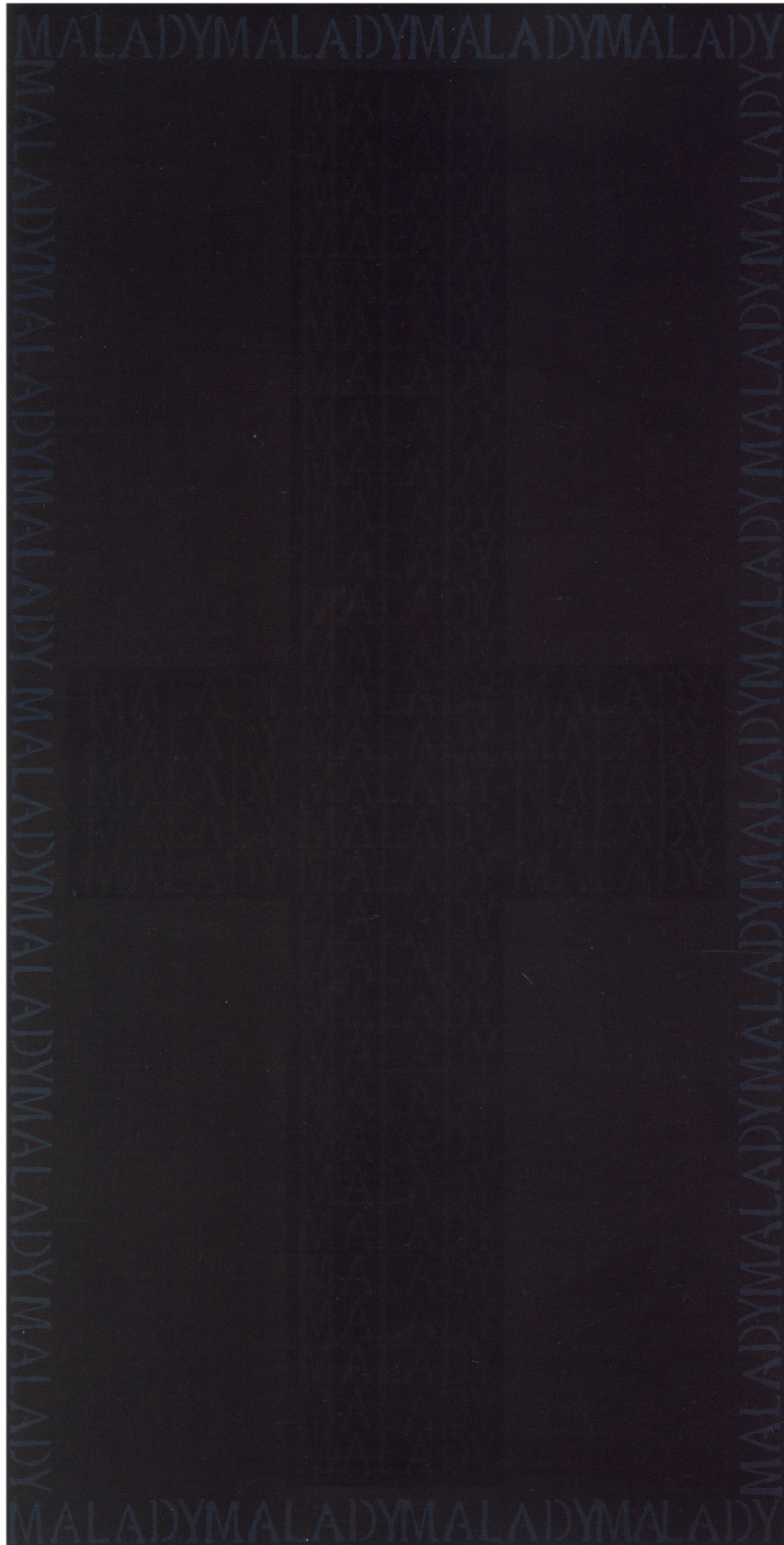


Fig. 8, Ralph Hotere, ***Black Painting XII from "Malady"***, 1970
acrylic on canvas, 1775 x 915 mm, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hakena, University of Otago
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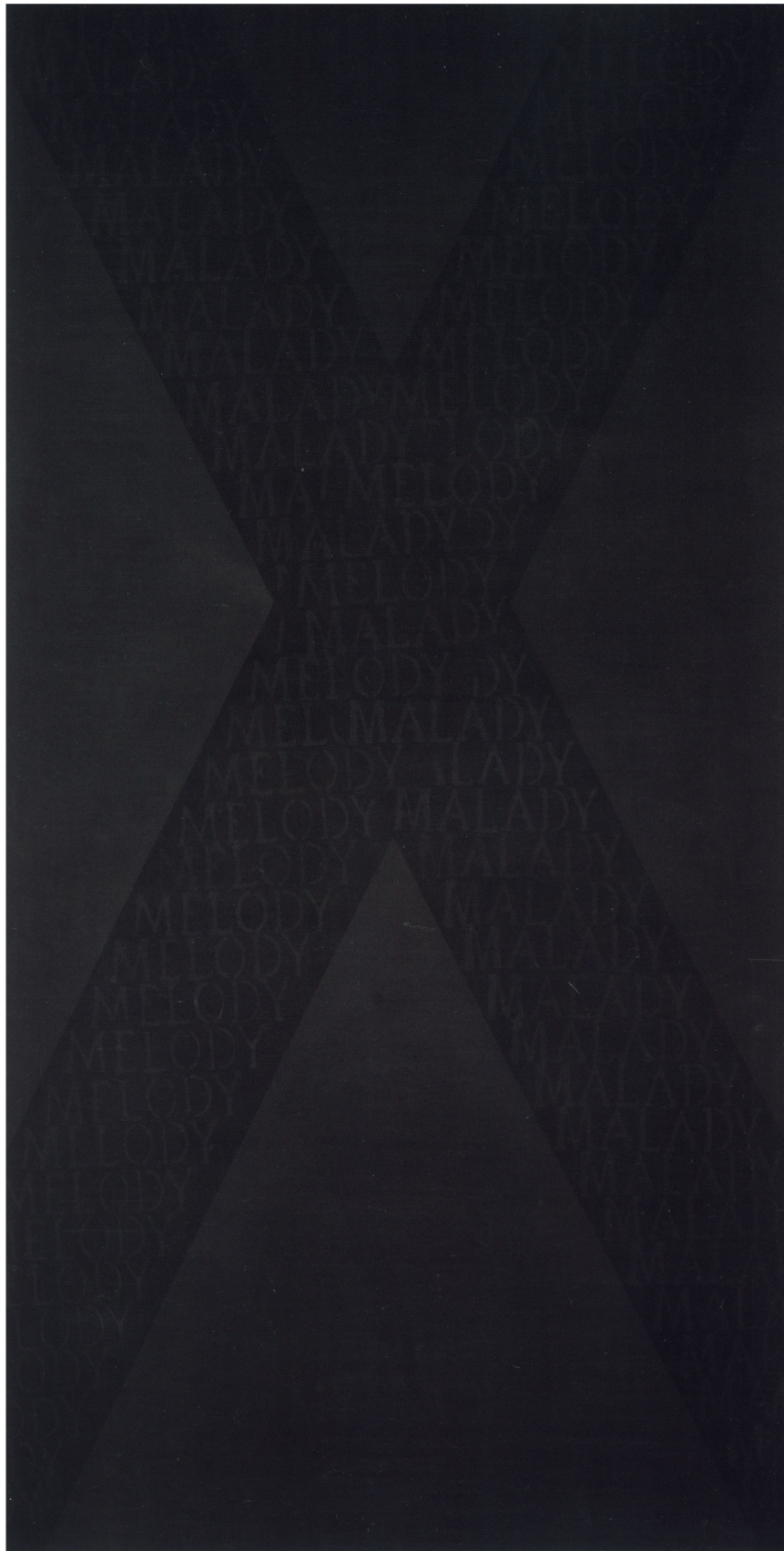


Fig. 9, Ralph Hotere, ***Black Painting XV from "Malady"***, 1970
acrylic on canvas, 1777 x 915 mm, Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa
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Fig. 10, Ralph Hotere, *Black Painting XIIB from "Malady"*, 1970

acrylic on canvas, 1775 x 915 mm, Fide Trust, Christchurch

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Introduction and Prologue

0.4 Introduction: figuring a thesis, context and structure

0.4.1 Figuring a thesis

This thesis is an *intervention in* and *interweaving of* the discourse surrounding Colin McCahon and Ralph Hotere, the philosophy of art, and the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan. As such, its primary objective is the generation of some new perspectives on and potentials for the practice of art history and art criticism in Aotearoa/New Zealand – although, I would suggest, these perspectives and potentials may be applied to arts discourse in general. The accomplishment of this primary, *practical* aim is facilitated through the realisation of a secondary, *theoretical* objective – namely, the elaboration of a Lacanian understanding of the nature of subjectivity, painting, discourse, and their interrelationships. In pursuing these aims, the thesis makes a twofold contribution to existing scholarship. Firstly, it explains, develops, and applies a Lacanian model of subjectivity understood in terms of the *figuring of desire*. This novel formulation serves as convenient shorthand for what, in Lacanian parlance, may be referred to as the agent-like, metaphoric precipitation and automatist, metonymic perpetuation of symptomatic formations or *points de capiton* in discourses of desire. Secondly, this project analyses the discourse comprising paintings by McCahon and Hotere, and related writing and testimony, from the perspective of two *points de capiton* – the various complexities and inconsistencies of which are subsumed under the headings ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’.¹

¹ The Lacanian *point de capiton* (also translated, variously, as ‘button tie’ or ‘quilting point’) is key concept that will merit further elaboration in later chapters. For the time being, it suffices to say that the *point de capiton* admits consideration, variously, as a *sign, meaning, symptomatic formation, figure of discourse* or, indeed, a collection of such. For references to the *point de capiton*, see Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book III. The Psychoses, 1955-1956*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans Russell Grigg, with notes by Russell Grigg (London: Routledge, 1993, originally published as *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre III. Les psychoses, 1955-1956* (Paris: Seuil, 1981)), 258-70, and *ibid*, ‘The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud’ in *Écrits, the First Complete Edition in English*, trans Bruce Fink in collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006, originally written as ‘L’instance de la lettre dans l’inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud’ (1957) and originally published in *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966)), 419.

In the course of these deliberations, three basic questions emerge, each of which defines one of the main divisions of the thesis. In the first place, the thesis asks: *what is subjectivity?* That is to say, from the perspective of art history and art criticism, what is the nature of the creative ‘agency’ or ‘motivating principle’ in art-making, and in the writing and testimony surrounding this activity? In this regard (and as Lacan observes in ‘Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis’ (1948)), the instrumental point is: ‘Only a subject can understand a meaning; conversely, every meaning phenomenon implies a subject.’² In other words, from a Lacanian perspective, ‘subjectivity’ ↔ ‘meaning-making’: always already, *to be a subject is to be a subject in and of language*. This understanding informs the second, key, thesis question: *what is painting considered as an expression or sign of subjectivity?* Here, the critical idea is that, considered as a *sign* of subjectivity/meaning-making, painting is *language-mediated*: it is legitimate to speak of a *language of painting* and to seek an elucidation of its structures and laws. These first two considerations define the third thesis question, namely: *how may these conceptions of subjectivity and painting illuminate certain ambiguities and contradictions appearing in the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere?* In this context, the term *discourse* is understood to define the field in which there obtain exchanges of, and interactions between, expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making. From this standpoint, the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere encompasses their work *and* related writing and testimony – where, moreover, always already it is the case that paintings by McCahon and Hotere, respectively, are part *of* the discourse *and* reflections *on* the discourse.

0.4.2 Positioning a thesis

The outline presented above will merit further elaboration in the subsection detailing the thesis structure. However, before proceeding with that discussion, it is appropriate to specify how this study relates to existing scholarship and to identify the areas in which it

² Lacan, ‘Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis’ in *Écrits* (2006) (originally published as ‘L’agressivité en psychanalyse’ in *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*, v12, n2, 1948, 367-88), 83.

can make a contribution. Here, I would locate the thesis in two primary contexts. Firstly, it sits within the discourse of Lacanian psychoanalysis or, more precisely, in that part of the discourse addressing Lacanian theory from a philosophical, as opposed to a clinical, perspective. Secondly, the thesis may be located within that part of arts discourse in Aotearoa/New Zealand invoking ‘theory’ in order to critique and deepen understandings of artists’ work and the writing and testimony surrounding this work. By *theory*, I have in mind, specifically, the twentieth century, Continental discourses associated with psychoanalysis and post-structuralism. Even more precisely, the thesis finds its place within the ‘theory-flavoured’ discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere that exists at the time of writing, of which, I say more below.

With regard to the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis, I should concede at the outset that the thesis seeks to present neither a comprehensive account nor a radical reformulation of Lacan’s ideas. I approach Lacanian theory as a scholar whose background is in art history and art theory and, from this perspective, my engagement with theory is, as stated above, primarily directed towards the generation of some new perspectives on and potentials for arts scholarship in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Nevertheless, it may be allowed that, in some fashion, I am making a contribution to the philosophy of Lacanian psychoanalysis insofar as I am, inevitably, engaged in translating its terms of reference into forms that may be efficacious in achieving the primary thesis aim. These gestures may be summarised as follows: (1) I present a (Heideggerian-flavoured) understanding of the Lacanian unconscious in terms of meaning potentials and possibilities, (2) I elaborate a Lacanian model of subjectivity and the formalisation of fantasy (as expressed in the algorithm $\$ \diamond a$) in terms of a logically and structurally necessary counterpoise not only of conscious/unconscious but also of possibility/impossibility (where the order of the possible defines the tension between consciousness and the unconscious, and the order of the impossible defines what Lacan terms the ‘real’), (3) I engage with, as yet, little discussed or unpublished material (particularly, Lacan’s *Seminar IX*), and (4), as previously stated, I present an understanding of the metaphoric precipitation and metonymic perpetuation of *points de capiton* in terms of the figuring of desire.

Here, the issue of translation demands further attention. Whilst this is not intended to be a genuflection in the direction of a mythical, original text or testimony, nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that this project makes recourse to English-language translations of material originally spoken or written in French. The body of work in question comprises Lacan's essays, composed/published between 1936 and 1965, and collected in *Écrits* (1966), and the twenty seven, annual *Seminar*, presented between 1953 and 1980 (just over half of which have been published in French and a mere eight in English). In the former case, the thesis refers to Bruce Fink's recent translation *Écrits, the First Complete Edition in English* (2006). Compared with the nine scripts available in what was, for many years, the primary, English-language reference to Lacan's *Écrits* – namely, Alan Sheridan's *Écrits: A Selection* (1977) – Fink's translation presents thirty three pieces of writing, in conjunction with appendices and comprehensive translator's endnotes, and thus commends itself as the definitive reference for Anglophone scholarship. The *Seminar* cited in the thesis comprise translations of official texts produced under the editorship of Jacques-Alain Miller and unofficial translations produced by Cormac Gallagher, available to purchase from Karnac Books, <http://www.karnacbooks.com/>, and available to download free from the website *Jacques Lacan in Ireland, Collected Translations and Papers by Cormac Gallagher*, <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/>. I would concede that, in the context of a doctoral dissertation, the propriety of making recourse to Gallagher's translations may be cause for concern. By way of justifying my use of this material, I would appeal to Gallagher's own observation that the official versions of Lacan's work have attracted controversy – not only for the slow rate of their publication but also in relation to various editorial embellishments and elisions.³ Considered in this light, Gallagher's unofficial translations not only provide interim access to texts that, otherwise, would be unavailable to Anglophone scholars, they offer, also, to provide informative, alternative perspectives on

³ See, for example, the discussion in Cormac Gallagher, 'Re-Englishing Encore', *The Letter, Lacanian Perspectives on Psychoanalysis*, i33, Spring 2005, 1-21, <http://whatispsychoanalysis.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/The-Letter-Issue-33.pdf>, (19.02.15).

the official versions. Moreover, I would point out that Gallagher's translations are routinely employed in recent, English-language scholarship.⁴

Still further, as is implicit in my comment 'translating terms of reference', translation does not merely imply transposition from one language to another but also is intrinsic to explanation. This issue is particularly pertinent in the context of the present study. Even if it were not, already, the case that I am engaging with Lacan in translation, there would remain the necessity of making sense of texts and testimony that have a reputation for being difficult – if not, at times, impenetrable. In this regard, the particular challenges Lacanian theory presents, and the particular strategies of reading and interpretation it demands are evident from Fink's comments in *Lacan to the Letter: Reading Écrits Closely* (2004). Here, Fink suggests that Lacan's work is intentionally

...declarative rather than demonstrative... the reader is hard pressed to find an argument in it to sustain any one particular claim, Lacan leaving the task of supplying arguments to the reader...⁵

As Fink implies, ultimately, it is up to the reader of Lacan's work to make their own sense of it. Indeed, by way of illustrating this point, Fink refers to Lacan's remarks, in *Seminar XVIII, vis à vis* the difficulty of the material presented in *Écrits*. Acknowledging that 'worldly people... "can't understand anything in it" ', nevertheless, Lacan finds this state of affairs to be 'full of hope' in that these expressions of frustration are

⁴ For example, Tom Eyers' *Lacan and the Concept of the Real* (2012) is one scholarly text, referenced in the present study, that makes use of Gallagher's translations. A brief search online reveals several other recent books whose authors have, similarly, availed themselves of Gallagher's work. Examples include Adrian Johnston, *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive* (Northwestern University Press, 2005), Mathew Sharpe and Geoff Boucher, *Žižek and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), and Ian Parker, *Psychology After Lacan: Connecting the Clinic and Research* (Hove and New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁵ Fink, *Lacan to the Letter: Reading Écrits Closely* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 65.

...the sign that one is affected by it. It is a good thing that they understand nothing about it! Because one can never understand anything except what of course one has already in one's head.⁶

Notwithstanding my debt to those many scholars whose erudition has facilitated my negotiation of Lacanian theory, it is certainly the case that the performance of the thesis task has demanded my own, particular synthesis. With the aim of maximising the potential audience for this study (in the first instance, arts scholars and arts practitioners working in Aotearoa/New Zealand), I have sought to make my encounter with Lacan's work as transparent as possible. In practice, this desire for clarity has necessitated a considerable degree of exegesis. However, in defence of this strategy, I would argue that, firstly, a fundamental aim of the thesis is to interweave theory and practice with the intention of promoting mutually enriching conversations across disciplinary boundaries. Secondly, there has been, to my knowledge, no comprehensive or thoroughgoing conversation between Lacanian theory and the discourse of art history and art criticism as practised in Aotearoa/New Zealand – particularly in that part of the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere. It is in this (relative) silence that the thesis finds an opportunity to 'speak'.

In the context of arts scholarship in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the 'theory-flavoured' discourse, to which I alluded earlier is, perhaps, most readily apparent from the early 1980s onwards. A comprehensive account of this field lies beyond the scope of the present study. Nevertheless, by way of establishing a useful context within which to outline the theory-flavoured discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere, I observe that the mid 1980s witnessed a flurry of short-lived periodicals in which there is explicit engagement with matters of theory. These include, for example, *Parallax, a journal of postmodern literature and art* (three issues between Spring 1982 and Winter 1983), and

⁶ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XVIII. On a discourse that might not be a semblance*, 1971, unpublished transcript in Gallagher (trans), *Jacques Lacan in Ireland, Collected Translations and Papers*, <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book-18-On-a-discourse-that-might-not-be-a-semblance.pdf>, (17.08.12), Seminar 6, 17 March 1971, 12, quoted (with a slightly different translation) in Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 176, n2.

And (four issues between August 1983 and October 1985).⁷ However, from the perspective of this present study, the most relevant of these initiatives is, perhaps, *Antic* (eight issues between June 1986 and December 1990 – the penultimate issue being of especial significance insofar as essays on Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis predominate). In some of these articles, Lacanian theory is invoked only in passing or by way of other writers – examples being Anne Maxwell, ‘Poststructuralist and Feminist Literary Theories: The Problematic Relation’ (1986) and Bridget Sutherland, ‘Psychoanalysis and the Art of Christine Webster’ (1990).⁸ One essay that *does* refer, directly, to Lacan’s writing is Laurence Simmons, ‘“Tracing The Self”: the Self-Portraits of Rita Angus’ (1988). Here, in some detail, Simmons cites Lacan’s early, landmark essay ‘The Mirror Stage’ (1949) in support of his contention that Angus’ self-portraits are less concerned with ‘mimesis as the basis of figuration’ and, rather, ‘ego-building’ – that is, an imaginative process of self-realisation.⁹

Simmons’ work notwithstanding, among the most relevant and sophisticated engagements with theory to appear in *Antic* were Lita Barrie’s ‘Remissions: Toward a Deconstruction of Phallic Univocality’ (1986) and ‘Further Toward a Deconstruction of Phallic Univocality: Deferrals’ (1987) (both of which, originally, appeared in the quarterly *AGMANZ journal*), and Stephen Zepke’s critical response: ‘Repetitions:

⁷ See, for example, Wystan Curnow, ‘Post-Modernism in Poetry and the Visual Arts’, *Parallax, a journal of postmodern literature and art*, v1, n1, Spring 1982, 7-28, Elizabeth Eastmond, ‘The Snake Slid, some Signifieds Collided – in recent works by Alexis Hunter’, *And*, n3, October 1984, 31-44, and Warwick Slinn, ‘Dragons and Giants: Some Myths About Deconstruction’, *And* n4, October 1985, 65-72. For a thoughtful analysis of the manner by which postmodernism ‘arrived’ in New Zealand in the early 1980s – including assessments of publications like *And* and *Parallax* – see Leonard Wilcox, ‘Postmodernism or Anti-modernism’, *Landfall* 155, v39, n3, September 1985, 344-64.

⁸ See Anne Maxwell, ‘Poststructuralist and Feminist Literary Theories: The Problematic Relation’, *Antic*, n1, June 1986, 59-71, and Bridget Sutherland, ‘Psychoanalysis and the Art of Christine Webster’, *Antic*, n7, June 1990, 60-69.

⁹ Laurence Simmons, ‘“Tracing The Self”: the Self-Portraits of Rita Angus’, *Antic*, n4, October 1988, 49. Here, Simmons refers to the version of Lacan’s essay published in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1977), 1-7.

Toward A Re-Construction of Phallic Univocality' (1990).¹⁰ In 'Remissions', the ideological tenor of Barrie's writing is evident from her identification of the necessity for 'a vital intersection between theory and practice' by which a 'radical feminist criticism' may enable 'women to take responsibility as Subjects of their work.'¹¹ Indeed, Barrie's stance reflects *Antic*'s mission statement to 'foreground aspects of a growing body of work dealing with... feminist and other theoretical practices often ignored by existing arts publications in New Zealand.'¹² Still further, Barrie appeals to the thought of Jacques Derrida in order to deconstruct what, after Derrida, she believes to be the 'phallogocentric' prejudices of Lacanian theory (i.e., in brief, the manner by which Lacanian psychoanalysis is thought to privilege the 'phallus' or 'phallic signifier' in its constructions of truth and meaning).¹³ To this extent, Barrie's work provides an indication of the important role feminism played in the introduction of Continental theory into the broader arts discourse in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the 1980s, and illustrates the somewhat fraught relationship between feminist thought and Lacanian theory. Nevertheless, that Barrie's writing may be problematic is evident from Zepke's strong criticism of Barrie's articles for being 'theoretically inadequate by their own requirements' insofar as they 'present misreadings of... [their]... sources' (namely, female authors associated with contemporary, French feminism such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous, as well as male writers like Derrida, and Lacan).¹⁴ Whilst a detailed examination of Barrie's essays and Zepke's rebuttal lies beyond the compass of the thesis, by way of acknowledging their achievements, and addressing the contestable issue of Lacanian phallogocentrism, I present a summary in section 8.1.

¹⁰ See Lita Barrie, 'Remissions: Toward a Deconstruction of Phallic Univocality', in *AGMANZ Journal* (Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand), v17, n1, Autumn 1986, 13-19, reprinted in *Antic*, n1, June 1986, 87-103, *ibid*, 'Further Toward a Deconstruction of Phallic Univocality: Deferrals', *AGMANZ Journal*, v17, n4, Summer 1986/87, 3-12, reprinted in *Antic*, n2, March 1987, 19-46, and Stephen Zepke, 'Repetitions: Toward A Re-Construction of Phallic Univocality', *Antic*, n7, June 1990, 41-56.

¹¹ Barrie, 'Remissions', 17.

¹² Anonymous, untitled, editors' note in *Antic*, n1, June 1986, 3.

¹³ See, Barrie, 'Remissions', 14, and *ibid*, 'Deferrals', 3-4.

¹⁴ Zepke, 'Repetitions', 41, 42.

Although writing by Barrie and Zepke provides some idea of the level of theory-flavoured, arts discourse in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the latter 1980s, of greater relevance to the positioning of this thesis is the volume and tenor of such writing in the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere. Immediately, I would point out that, whilst there is some writing of this kind in McCahon discourse, in Hotere discourse, this kind of scholarship is almost absent (which is *not* to suggest that Hotere discourse suffers from a dearth of intelligent and illuminating writing *per se* – on the contrary). In consequence, the positioning of this thesis differs in relation to McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse, respectively. In the former case, this project defines a position within, or takes a perspective on, a body of *existing* scholarship; in the latter event, the thesis is, to some degree, engaged in *creating* the scholarship in relation to which subsequent positions and perspectives may be taken. Furthermore, it also is apparent that the theory-flavoured writing that *does* exist almost completely eschews any in-depth engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis. As previously suggested, this state of affairs provides the thesis with an obvious opportunity to make an original contribution to the discourse.

With regard to the positioning of the thesis in McCahon discourse, the principal points of scholarly reference are provided by the theory-flavoured writing of Simmons, Zepke, and Rex Butler, produced between the late 1980s and the present. However, before outlining this material, it is appropriate to acknowledge allusions to theory in a selection of work by other writers. Relevant, in this respect, are three pieces by Wystan Curnow: firstly, the untitled and unpaginated essay included in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *I will need words: Colin McCahon's word and number paintings* (1984), secondly, 'McCahon and Signs', included in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Colin McCahon, Gates and Journeys* (1988), and thirdly, 'The Shining Cuckoo', included in Stephen Bann and William Allen, *Interpreting Contemporary Art* (1991). In the first two pieces, Curnow appeals to semiotic theory observing that, in the former case, 'The difference between words and images is that words as signifiers (i.e., as aural and visual signs) make no pretence to resemble their signifieds (i.e., the concepts to which

they refer).'¹⁵ Here, Curnow's allusion to the problem of 'resemblance' recalls Michel Foucault's discussion in 'This is not a pipe' (1968) and, in fact, Curnow subsequently cites Foucault's essay in 'McCahon and Signs'.¹⁶ In the context of the present study, Curnow's essays are, primarily, of interest in that their appeals to theory highlight the tension between painting and writing in McCahon's so-called 'written paintings', thereby

¹⁵ Curnow, untitled essay in Colin McCahon, *I will need words: Colin McCahon's word and number paintings*, exh. cat. (Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1984), np. Curnow's essay will merit closer attention in chapter five.

¹⁶ See Curnow, 'McCahon and Signs' in Auckland City Art Gallery, *Colin McCahon, Gates and Journeys*, exh. cat. (Auckland: 1988), 43. Insofar as Curnow specifies his source as 'Michel Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe*, 1982', it is likely that he is citing from the revised and expanded version of Foucault's essay published in book form: *This Is Not a Pipe, With Illustrations and Letters by René Magritte*, trans and ed. James Harkness (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1983, originally published as *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (Montpellier: Éditions fata morgana, 1973)).

A brief consideration of Foucault's essay seems indicated insofar as it constitutes an important precedent for the position advanced in the thesis that absolute distinctions between image and text, painting and writing cannot be sustained. Here, my reference is Foucault, 'This is not a pipe' in James D. Faubion (ed), *Michel Foucault, Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology* (New York: New Press, 1998, originally published as 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' in *Les Cahiers du chemin*, v15, n2, 1968, 79-105). Particularly relevant is Foucault's discussion of René Magritte's *The Two Mysteries* (1966, ref. 1), which comprises a representation of a framed painting on an easel, depicting a pipe and an accompanying caption: 'ceci n'est pas une pipe' – this ensemble juxtaposed with another, much larger, image of a pipe floating at upper left, in an indeterminate space. Foucault characterises this painting as 'a calligram that Magritte has secretly constructed, then carefully unraveled' (189), defining a calligram as that which 'brings a text and a shape as close together as possible... It lodges statements in the space of a shape, and makes the text *say* what the drawing *represents*' and, in so doing,

...the calligram aspires playfully to efface the oldest oppositions of our alphabetical civilization: to show and to name; to shape and to say; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look and to read. (190)

Subsequently, Foucault uses Magritte's unravelling of the calligram to illustrate the paradoxes associated with 'Two principles' that have 'ruled Western painting from the fifteenth to the twentieth century.' As Foucault points out:

The first asserts the separation between plastic representation (which implies resemblance) and linguistic reference (which excludes it)... The second principle posits an equivalence between the fact of resemblance and the affirmation of a representative bond. (195)

That is to say, the first principle insists on maintaining absolute distinctions between plastic and graphic, painting and writing. However, this is directly contradicted by the second principle, which asserts that, always already, to resemble/represent *is to affirm* or *convey meaning*.

placing in question the idea that absolute distinctions obtain between ‘plastic’ and ‘graphic’, ‘pictorial’ and ‘symbolic’, ‘seeing’ and ‘reading’. To this extent, Curnow’s writing is in harmony with a key position taken by the thesis – namely, that, insofar as painting admits consideration as a sign or expression of subjectivity/meaning-making, *painting is writing* and *writing is painting*. Indeed, the illustration of this perspective is one reason the thesis engages primarily with artworks that incorporate painted text.

In Curnow’s essay ‘The Shining Cuckoo’, ‘McCahon’s modernism’ is elaborated by way of a brief engagement with Jean-François Lyotard’s reflections on the modern sublime and a, somewhat more substantive, discussion of Derrida’s critique of Kant’s conception of *parerga* or framing elements.¹⁷ A key inference of Curnow’s discussion is that, in keeping with Derrida’s consideration of the question of the frame, to some degree, McCahon’s work defines an ‘outside’ the frame of modernism that, at the same time, offers to enter and supplement the ‘inside’ of the modernist frame, thereby defining that inside *as* inside.¹⁸ In so doing, Curnow conceives of McCahon’s work in terms of a ‘resistance’ to the manner by which ‘The art world “border” frames contemporary art practice and its reception and distinguishes a centre from provinces beyond its margins.’¹⁹ Here, it may be noted that the question of the frame and, in particular, the manner by which McCahon’s work offers to subvert or unsettle the frame of modernism, also is a theme prominent in the writing of Francis Pound. For example, in the *Art Monthly Australia* essay ‘Colin McCahon and the language of practical religion’ (1990), Pound remarks on McCahon’s ‘strangeness, the very eccentricity of his place in the larger modernist endeavour’ and suggests that ‘McCahon... is... *ex-modern*... at once inside and

¹⁷ Curnow, ‘The Shining Cuckoo’ in Stephen Bann and William Allen (eds), *Interpreting Contemporary Art* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1991), 36-37, 38-42. Here, Curnow’s sources are Jean-François Lyotard, ‘The Sublime and the Avant-Garde’, *Artforum*, v22, n8, April 1984, 36-43, and Jacques Derrida, ‘The Parergon’, trans Craig Owens, *October*, v9, Summer 1979, 3-41.

¹⁸ In effect, Curnow is appealing to Derrida’s conception of the logic of the supplement. For further elaboration of this term, see section 8.2.

¹⁹ Curnow, ‘The Shining Cuckoo’, 39.

outside of the whole high modernist endeavour.’²⁰ These sentiments are reiterated (almost word for word) in at least three other published works – most recently, the *Journal of New Zealand Art History* piece ‘McCahon, Mondrian, Masking Tape: A Reading of the Centre from the Outermost Edge’ (2002).²¹

Whilst this by no means exhausts the field of possibilities, three further examples of theory-flavoured writing in McCahon discourse are worthy of acknowledgement. These comprise the *Antic* essay co-authored by Robert Leonard and Stuart McKenzie, ‘Pathetic Projections: Wilfulness in the Wilderness’ (1989), Richard Lummis’ unpublished, doctoral dissertation, *Modelling the New Zealand artist: Rita Angus & Colin McCahon* (2004), and Luke Smythe’s essay ‘Colin McCahon’ in the self-published text *Bill Culbert, Colin McCahon* (2004). In the first place, then, Leonard and McKenzie appeal to semiotic theory in order to interrogate the problematic nature of the artistic identity expressed in McCahon’s paintings. In essence, Leonard and McKenzie claim that McCahon’s *oeuvre* bears witness to a thematic development whereby, successively, McCahon reifies, places in question and, finally, is forced to confront the insufficiency of the idea that an artwork might securely express an identity between self and world. This *thematic* development is defined in terms of a *stylistic* progression from realism to abstraction, Leonard and McKenzie concluding that, with reference to three, key paintings, the progressive elimination of ‘the vestiges of a “realism” ’ ensures that ‘The landscape, initially advanced as a model of the self, finds its consummate elaboration as a sign.’²²

²⁰ Francis Pound, ‘Colin McCahon and the language of practical religion’, *Art Monthly Australia*, n32, July 1990, 12, 13. I will return to Pound’s essay in chapter six.

²¹ See, for example, *ibid*, ‘McCahon, Skies, Stars, Writing’, *Scripsi*, v6, n3, November 1990, 157, *ibid*, ‘From Here: Reading and Misreading European, Russian and American Modernism’ in James Ross (ed), *New Zealand Modernism – In Context: Paintings from The Gibbs Collection* (Wellington: The Gibbs Collection, 1995), 16, and *ibid*, ‘McCahon, Mondrian, Masking Tape: A Reading of the Centre from the Outermost Edge’, *Journal of New Zealand Art History*, v23, 2002, 16-17.

²² Robert Leonard and Stuart McKenzie, ‘Pathetic Projections: Wilfulness in the Wilderness’, *Antic*, n5, June 1989, 46. Among the McCahon paintings invoked by Leonard and McKenzie to support their argument are *Takaka: night and day* (001361, July 1948, ref. 3), *On building bridges (triptych)* (000010, July – September 1952, ref. 4), and *The days and nights in the*

Secondly, Lummis invokes landmark writings such as Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author' (1967) and Foucault's 'What is an Author' (1969) in support of his contention that 'artists figure as fictional creations – modelled in much the same way that a novelist might construct a central character, or a diarist might contrive a self'.²³ Whilst Lummis' engagement with theory does not extend further than preliminary, methodological gestures, his appreciation that fabrications of artistic identity are 'enacted upon' artists 'through a range of commentaries, biographical texts and art reviews', as well as by the 'performances' of artists themselves, resonates strongly with the impetus of the present study.²⁴ However, a basic difference between this thesis and Lummis' dissertation is that my investigations seek to go further than defining certain formations within the discursive field (e.g., the art subjects called 'Angus' or 'McCahon') and tracing the fate of these formations over time. Rather, with the aid of Lacanian psychoanalysis, this study also is concerned to theorise the nature or conditions of possibility of these kinds of formations and, indeed, the nature or conditions of the possibility of performing analysis and scholarship *per se* (this latter point will become clearer in the second part of the thesis Introduction).²⁵

Finally, of immediate relevance to the concerns of the thesis, Smythe appeals to the literary theory of Maurice Blanchot in order to interrogate the ambiguous nature of the

wilderness showing the constant flow of light passing through the wall of death (000621, April – June 1971, ref. 5).

²³ Richard G. Lummis, *Modelling the New Zealand artist: Rita Angus & Colin McCahon* (PhD thesis: University of Otago, 2004), 1, 2-4.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

²⁵ Here, I hasten to add that I intend no denigration of Lummis' dissertation. Within its terms of reference, I consider it to be a work of admirable erudition. My point is, rather, that, always already, scholarly terms of reference are open to redefinition – indeed, are *as being* constantly redefined in innumerable different ways. Precisely this kind of redefinition is at stake in Lummis' 'Abstract', where he asserts that his 'primary concern is not the art but rather the cultural construction of... [Angus and McCahon] and their work' (ii). In other words, Lummis is engaged in challenging orthodox notions of what might constitute the primary 'objects' of an 'art history thesis' (i.e., texts rather than artworks). Similar challenges are posed in the present study.

subjectivity expressed in the monumental ‘I AM’ of McCahon’s *Victory over Death 2* (001502, February 1970, ref. 6, fig. 1). Specifically, and in harmony with the position taken in the present study, Smythe proposes that the ‘“I” of McCahon’s painting’ does not ‘bear... a concrete relation to an identifiable speaking subject’ but rather the ‘strange and endless murmuring... of language itself’.²⁶ In seeking to elaborate this impersonal voice of language, Smythe appeals to what, in *The Infinite Conversation* (1969), Blanchot refers to as the ‘narrative... neutral voice that speaks the work from out of this place without a place, where the work is silent.’²⁷ Smythe’s writing will merit only passing consideration in chapter three. Nevertheless, I would point out that his invocation of Blanchot’s ‘narrative... neutral voice’ bears comparison with Lacan’s understanding of the ‘letter’ as the ‘essence of the signifier’ and Derrida’s conception of the ‘trace’ – namely, what will be referred to as the ineffable, ‘real-as-impossible’ function of pure difference implicated in the *structuring of the structure* of the field of subjectivity.²⁸

Having presented a brief account of some noteworthy, theory-flavoured texts in McCahon discourse, I now turn to the aforementioned trio of writers whose work defines, more precisely, the context in which this thesis operates: Simmons, Zepke, and Butler. This writing falls into three main categories: (1) Simmons’ essays ‘McCahon’s Myth’ (originally conceived in 1988), ‘The Enunciation of the Annunciation. Discourses of Painting’ (1990), and ‘“after Titian”: Intertextuality and Deconstruction in an Early Painting by Colin McCahon’ (1991) – all of which were subsequently re-worked and included in Simmons’ collection of essays *The image always has the last word, on Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Photography* (2002)²⁹, (2) Zepke’s

²⁶ Luke Smythe, *Bill Culbert, Colin McCahon* (Auckland: Luke Smythe, 2004), 29.

²⁷ Maurice Blanchot, ‘The Narrative Voice (*the “he,” the neutral*)’ in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans and Foreword by Susan Hanson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, originally published as *L’Entretien infini* (Paris: Editions Gallimard: 1969)), 385.

²⁸ The Lacanian conception of the ‘letter’ as the ‘essence of the signifier’ is elaborated in chapter three. For an account of the Derridean trace, see section 8.2. For discussion of the Lacanian conception of the ‘real’ as the ‘order of the impossible’, see the thesis Prologue.

²⁹ See Simmons, ‘McCahon’s Myth’ in *The image always has the last word, on Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Photography* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2002, originally

unpublished Masters thesis *Colin McCahon and the Writing of Difference* (1992), and (3) recent scholarship produced by Simmons and Butler (either working independently or in collaboration) – of which two particularly apposite texts are Simmons’ ‘“I shall go and wake him”’: The *figura* of Lazarus in Colin McCahon’s Painting’ (2003), and Butler’s *Colin McCahon in Australia* (2010).

Beginning, then, with Simmons’ writing composed between 1988 and 1991, it is clear that Derridean deconstruction is a key resource, although there also are references to the writing of Barthes, Kristeva, Paul de Man, and others. Thus, in ‘McCahon’s Myth’, Simmons critiques the biographical emphasis of much McCahon scholarship, arguing that this feature persists in the latter 1990s. In so doing, Simmons makes reference to Derrida’s consideration of the term ‘signature’ in *Signéponge* (1984), as well as Barthes’ aforementioned ‘Death of the Author’.³⁰ In ‘The Enunciation of the Annunciation’, Simmons addresses the relationship between painting and writing in McCahon’s work, proposing (in harmony with the impetus of the present study) that ‘the pictorial moment would not be effective if not framed by the linguistic moment that preceded it, or that follows it’ and ‘One can only see what one can say.’³¹ Moreover, Simmons invokes Derrida’s discussion of the ‘supplement’, the *parergon*, and ‘différance’ in order to understand the differing meaning effects of the relationships of image and text in McCahon’s *Annunciation* paintings of the latter 1940s.³² Finally, in ‘“after Titian”’, Simmons invokes Kristeva’s conception of ‘intertextuality’ in *Revolution in Poetic*

presented as a public lecture at Auckland City Art Gallery in 1988), 41-51, *ibid*, ‘The Enunciation of the Annunciation’ in Ian Wedde and Gregory Burke (eds), *Now See Hear! Art, language and translation* (Wellington: Victoria University Press for the Wellington City Art Gallery, 1990), 179-88, and *ibid*, ‘“after Titian”: Intertextuality and Deconstruction in an Early Painting by Colin McCahon’ in *Interstices, Journal of Architecture and Related Arts*, v1, 1991, <http://interstices.aut.ac.nz/ijara/index.php/ijara/article/viewFile/46/109>, (11.03.15), 99-115.

³⁰ *Ibid*, ‘McCahon’s Myth’, 41, 42, 43.

³¹ *Ibid*, ‘The Enunciation of the Annunciation’, 180.

³² *Ibid*, 184-87. The works to which Simmons refers are *The Angel of the Annunciation* (001039, April 1947, ref. 7), *Hail Mary* (001221, December 1947 – March 1948, ref. 8), and *Annunciation* (000630, July – November 1949, ref. 9).

Language (1974), in combination with Derridean deconstruction, in order to unsettle the idea that McCahon's paintings referring to Titian's *Entombment* (1559, ref. 10) are, simply or immediately, expressions of artistic 'influence' or 'historical-causal relationships' obtaining between different works, or that they bear witness to a 'reductive, subtractive mode of composition' by which McCahon distils what is essential in Titian's precedent.³³ In many respects, Simmons' essay prefigures and parallels the direction of the discussion presented in the opening thesis chapter. Where I would differentiate my approach from that of Simmons is that (1) I consider artworks and the writing and testimony surrounding artworks to be signs or expressions of desiring subjectivity/meaning-making rather than 'texts' *per se* (a distinction that, to some degree, encapsulates the different emphases of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derridean deconstruction), and (2) as *signs* of subjectivity, I understand artworks and art contexts to be collections of meaning/forms in accordance with what I call the function of representation/symbolisation (i.e., subjective experience understood as *thinking in and as signs*). That is to say, I approach the problem from the perspective that one engages with *painted texts* and/or *written paintings* in the field of *painting/writing* rather than what Simmons refers to as 'paintings as text'³⁴ – phrasing that, from the perspective of this project, risks sustaining artificial distinctions between painting and writing, pictorial and symbolic, plastic and graphic, image and text.

In common with Simmons' writing, Zepke's *Colin McCahon and the Writing of Difference* exhibits a sophisticated grasp of contemporary theory. Indeed, more than twenty years after its creation, Zepke's thesis remains, in my view, one of the most ambitious pieces of critical writing in McCahon discourse. It is for this reason that, notwithstanding its status as an unpublished work, aspects of Zepke's discussion merit special attention in chapter five. Of particular relevance to the present study, Zepke's thesis makes passing allusions to Lacanian psychoanalysis – although, like Simmons,

³³ Ibid, '“after Titian”', 99-100, 107-08. Simmons refers to Colin McCahon, *Entombment (after Titian)* (001089, 1946, ref. 11) and Colin McCahon, *Entombment (after Titian)* (001034, January – May 1947, ref. 12).

³⁴ Ibid, 100, 101, 110.

Derridean post-structuralism is Zepke's primary resource.³⁵ Furthermore, I observe that, in accordance with the impetus of this project, Zepke emphasises how his 'readings of McCahon's paintings have tried to avoid the metaphysics of a traditional Art History'.³⁶ That is to say, an art history preoccupied with the determination of what might be termed origins and essences, ends and absolutes of the truth, meaning, and being of art objects and art subjects. Precisely what this implies will become clearer in the second part of the thesis Introduction, where I define the methodology of this study in terms of 'traversing the fantasies of the traditionalising mode of art history'.

In recent, theory-flavoured McCahon scholarship by Simmons and/or Butler, Simmons' '“I shall go and wake him”' and Butler's *Colin McCahon in Australia* are particularly noteworthy and, indeed, merit closer attention in chapter six. In the former case, Simmons' seminar piece parallels the concerns of the thesis in three main respects. Firstly, by way of Erich Auerbach's writing, Simmons invokes the term *figura* in order to analyse the significance of the story of Lazarus as represented in McCahon's *Practical Religion, the resurrection of Lazarus showing Mount Martha* (001019, December 1969 – February 1970, ref. 13, fig. 2).³⁷ The congruence in question obtains insofar as, in essence, *figura* function as figures of discourse or, in Lacanian parlance, *points de capiton*.³⁸ Furthermore, the manner by which, on Auerbach's account, *figura* admit a dimension of prophecy, harmonises with what will be referred to as the 'complex temporality' of *points de capiton* such that meaning precipitates as perpetuated or

³⁵ For some references to Zepke's invocations of Lacanian theory see, for example, Zepke, *Colin McCahon and the Writing of Difference* (MA Thesis: University of Auckland, 1992), 19, 25-26, 29.

³⁶ Ibid, 2.

³⁷ Simmons, '“I shall go and wake him”': The *figura* of Lazarus in Colin McCahon's Painting' in Roger Taberner (ed), *Colin McCahon, A Question of Faith, papers from a seminar* (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tāmaki, 2003), 12-16.

³⁸ Indeed, I should acknowledge that my considerations of what I call the *figuring* of painting are indebted to Simmons' discussion of Auerbach's *figura*.

crystallises *as* that which *will be what it was*.³⁹ Secondly, Simmons addresses biblical parables (in effect, species of *figura*), suggesting that ‘A parabolic narrative is... in some way governed at its origin and at its end... by something that transcends altogether direct presentation.’ In this regard, Simmons’ account of parabolic narratives resonates with what Lacan refers to as the ‘hidden’, ‘metaphoric’ dimension of *points de capiton* and also Slavoj Žižek’s allusion to the ineffable ‘object-cause of desire’ that ‘resides in the *curved space of desire*.’⁴⁰ Thirdly, Simmons relates the prophetic dimension of *figura* to Derrida’s conception of the paradoxical ‘messianic structure’ of acts of faith.⁴¹ That is to say, the manner by which, in the absence of any objective justification, leaps of faith, nevertheless, *envision* the emergence of meaning (i.e., the precipitation of *points de capiton*). In consequence, as Derrida points out in ‘The Villanova Roundtable’ (1994), faith, thus conceived, is ‘presupposed by the most radical deconstructive gesture.’⁴² That is to say, the very possibility of performing a deconstruction or, in Lacanian language, traversing fantasy – of fabricating meaning or conducting an analysis – is dependent on making a leap of faith in the efficacy of these praxes.⁴³

Finally, in Butler’s seminar piece, *Colin McCahon in Australia*, one encounters discussion of the ‘universal, globe-spanning, messianic fate... [McCahon’s] work understands for itself’ – which Butler also terms ‘McCahon’s *afterlife*... the fate of his works once he is dead.’⁴⁴ Subsequently, Butler elaborates the afterlife of McCahon’s

³⁹ The complex temporality of *points de capiton*, and what this implies for expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, is elaborated in chapters two and four.

⁴⁰ Simmons, ‘“I shall go and wake him”’, 17. The Lacanian and Žižekian inferences of Simmons’ commentary are elaborated, further, in chapter six.

⁴¹ Ibid, 21-22.

⁴² Derrida in ‘The Villanova Roundtable: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida’ in John D. Caputo (ed, with a Commentary), *Deconstruction In A Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 22.

⁴³ The Lacanian conception of ‘traversing fantasy’ will merit closer attention in the second part of the thesis Introduction.

⁴⁴ Rex Butler, *Colin McCahon in Australia* (Wellington: Victoria University, 2010), 10, 13. For some other references to the understanding of McCahon’s artistic legacy in terms of a messianic

work in terms of an ‘unknown’ quantity that defines an ‘impossible equivalence’ between two, mutually exclusive factors: *extrinsic* social and cultural ends that McCahon’s work serves and features *intrinsic* to the work. That is to say, Butler identifies the manner by which the locus of the meaning of McCahon’s *oeuvre* defines a contradictory simultaneity of transcendence and immanence, outside and inside.⁴⁵ Where Butler’s essay resonates with the concerns of the thesis is that it seeks to resolve this antinomy by way of an appeal to a Lacanian model of subjectivity. Thus, with reference to Žižek’s Lacanian analysis of the conception of the ‘authority’ underlying divine revelation in Søren Kierkegaard’s essay ‘Of the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle’ (1849), Butler directly invokes Lacan’s conception of the *objet petit a* (the so-called ‘object... cause of desire’) and, indirectly, alludes to the Lacanian formalisation of the fantasy (as represented in the matheme or algorithm $\$ \diamond a$).⁴⁶

At first glance, the positioning of the thesis in relation to theory-flavoured Hotere discourse, would seem to be a simple matter insofar as there is almost no scholarship of this kind (this study, in effect, defining an initial position from which, subsequently, work of this kind may proceed). Indeed, it may be suggested that, with regard to Hotere and his work, critical writing *per se* is (at least, relative to McCahon discourse) thin on the ground. In the *Landfall* article ‘Some Paintings I Am Frequently Asked About, Talking with Bill Manhire about Ralph Hotere’ (1996), Gregory O’Brien remarks on ‘the paucity of in-depth critical writing about... [Hotere’s] work over the past two decades’ even as ‘institutional and public recognition of... [this] work has increased markedly’ – a state of affairs to which, in O’Brien’s view, Hotere’s ‘reticence has almost certainly

afterlife see, for example Butler and Simmons, ‘Practical Religion: On the After-life of Colin McCahon’, *Landfall* 215, May 2008, 121, and, *ibid*, ‘“The Sound of Painting”: Colin McCahon’ in John Dixon Hunt, David Lomas, and Michael Corris, *Art, Word and Image, Two Thousand Years of Visual/Textural Interaction* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2010), 329-30.

⁴⁵ Butler, 11, 35-36.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 37-38. Butler’s appeal to Lacanian theory is made by way of discussion in Slavoj Žižek, ‘Why Is Every Act a Repetition?’ in *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and out* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001 (1992)), 94-97. *Objet petit a* and the formalisation of fantasy are introduced in the second part of the thesis Introduction and merit detailed discussion in chapter four.

contributed'.⁴⁷ On closer inspection, O'Brien's comment raises various questions that, in the third part of the thesis, I seek to address in my elaboration of the ambiguities and contradictions associated with the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence'. However, in the context of this preliminary discussion, I merely suggest that O'Brien's observation illustrates the degree to which Hotere discourse has been, simultaneously, enraptured and stymied by its 'objects' (i.e., Hotere and his work).

In the twenty years following the publication of O'Brien's article, Hotere discourse has expanded substantially. Nevertheless, I would argue that this discourse remains problematic to the extent that it indulges hagiography or canonising gestures, presents Hotere's work as fundamentally resistant to analysis or (what amounts to the same thing) formally autonomous or, otherwise, privileges Hotere-the-artist-individual as the primary point of reference in seeking to understand the meaning and significance of Hotere's work (even if the defining characteristic of this individual is to be reticent). Insofar Hotere discourse evinces writing of this kind, it remains in thrall to what, in the second part of the thesis Introduction, I refer to as the 'traditionalising' mode of art history and art criticism. This is not to say that Hotere discourse lacks depth and sophistication. Indeed, it is apparent that, in recent decades, writing on Hotere has reflected the broadening of the horizons of art history and art criticism typifying the contemporary era. In McCahon scholarship, appeals to Continental theory are but one symptom of this tendency towards inclusiveness and diversity. In Hotere discourse, the discursive 'symptomatology' differs in detail. Among its various manifestations, one might point to that body of (fairly recent) scholarship that seeks to take into account the complex nature of Hotere's artistic identity and the cultural context of his work – an identity and context that might be characterised as a confluence of Te Aupōuri, Māori, Catholic, Western-style modern, political activist, and so forth.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Gregory O'Brien, 'Some Paintings I Am Frequently Asked About, Talking with Bill Manhire about Ralph Hotere', *Landfall* 191, new series, v4, i1, March 1996, 21.

⁴⁸ With regard to Hotere's spiritual and cultural affiliations, writing by the likes of O'Brien, Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, and Rangihiroa Pānoho is particularly noteworthy. For example, the spiritual dimension of Hotere's 'hybridised Māori-Catholic... upbringing' forms the basis of discussion in O'Brien's 'Tenebrae – Transfigured Night, Ralph Hotere, a viable religious art and

Even though Hotere discourse generally eschews the level of engagement with Continental theory one witnesses in writing by the likes of Simmons, Zepke, and Butler, nevertheless, writing exists that either alludes to theory in a tangential fashion or exhibits a critical stance somewhat indebted to theory (specifically, the kinds of challenges theory has presented to what I will term the traditionalising mode of art history). Whilst the following discussion makes no pretence to be a comprehensive list of this work, I would suggest apposite examples may be found in texts by, respectively, Peter Leech, Damian Skinner, Pound, and Ian Wedde. Beginning, then, with Leech's *Art New Zealand* review piece 'Style and Change, Ralph Hotere' (1983-84), one encounters a glancing engagement with phenomenology and semiotic theory in Leech's discussion of the distinctions obtaining between 'signature' (which Leech defines as 'mere visual recognisability') and 'style' (which Leech defines as 'a univocal language for the working out and through of successive artistic concerns').⁴⁹ It may be observed that Leech's article occupies only a single page and omits bibliographic references. Nevertheless, Leech's analytical, philosophical approach is uncommon in Hotere discourse and, for that reason, Leech's short essay merits in-depth examination in chapter six.

Skinner's *Art New Zealand* review of the City Gallery, Wellington exhibition *Hotere – out the black window* (1997) does not, explicitly, invoke 'theory' but, nevertheless, stands

its traditions' in Dunedin Public Art Gallery and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongawera, *Ralph Hotere: Black Light, Major works including collaborations with Bill Culbert*, exh. cat. (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2000), 27. The occasionally ambiguous or, better perhaps, complex relationship between Hotere's work and, variously, Toi Māori, Māoritanga, and Mātauranga Māori, is explored in *ibid*, 'Necessary Distances, Hotere and Maori language' in *Hotere, Out The Black Window, Ralph Hotere's work with New Zealand poets* (Auckland: Godwit Publishing, 1997), Mane-Wheoki, 'Out On His Own: Ralph Hotere And The Maori Art Movement' in Roger Taberner and Ronald Brownson (eds), *Hotere, Seminar Papers from Into the Black* (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 1998) and *ibid*, 'Ralph Hotere: Te Hono ki Muriwhenua' in Ngahiraka Mason, *Turuki Turuki! Paneke Paneke!: When Māori Art Became Contemporary* (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2008), and Pānoho, 'Ethnicity in Hotere's Art' in Taberner and Brownson, *Hotere, Seminar Papers from Into the Black*.

⁴⁹ Peter Leech, 'Style and Change, Ralph Hotere', *Art New Zealand*, n29, Summer 1983-84, 19.

out in Hotere discourse for demonstrating a critical awareness of myth-making rhetoric and commentary that is excessively reductive or totalising. For example, whilst not questioning ‘the belief that Hotere’s art is generally excellent’ and even allowing that ‘Hotere’s art seems rather rare in the public sphere’, Skinner suggests that, among other things, *Hotere – out the black window* was, for some interested parties, ‘a chance to crown a new reigning champion of New Zealand art’.⁵⁰ Skinner goes on to observe that, despite the status of the touring exhibition and of O’Brien’s accompanying book, *Hotere, Out The Black Window, Ralph Hotere’s work with New Zealand poets* (1997), as elaborating only a single (albeit, important) thread of Hotere’s work,

The most dramatic tendency evinced in the numerous reviews and articles occasioned by the exhibition was the obvious and immediate desire to canonise Hotere, to promote him to an elevated position in the pantheon of New Zealand artists.⁵¹

Indeed, dismissing characterisations of Hotere as New Zealand’s ‘greatest’ artist as ‘ludicrous... unsubstantiated rhetorics that buy into outdated modernist ideas about art, artists and artistic value’, Skinner insists that

A lasting appreciation and evaluation of Hotere will not substitute the terms of a debased arts journalism for a well thought-out art history with a built in skepticism of hierarchy and canonisation.⁵²

In common with writing by Leech and Skinner, Pound’s essay ‘Tiger Country, Hotere, Reinhardt and the US Masters’, included in the catalogue accompanying the touring exhibition *Ralph Hotere: Black Light* (2000), makes no direct reference to

⁵⁰ Damian Skinner, ‘Ralph Hotere’s *Out the Black Window*’, *Art New Zealand*, n85, Summer 97-98, 25, 24.

⁵¹ Ibid, 25. Examples of the effusive rhetoric to which O’Brien alludes include Keith Stewart, ‘Funding decision is an artistic travesty’, *Sunday Star-Times*, 1 June, 1997, F2, who opines that ‘Ralph Hotere is our greatest living painter’ and Ruth Berry, ‘Big Hotere show first in 20 years’, *ibid*, 8 June 1997, A3, who refers to Hotere as ‘a man many consider to be the country’s greatest living painter’.

⁵² Skinner, 25.

Continental theory. However, 'Tiger Country' does invoke theory, indirectly, in a two-fold sense. In the first place, Pound's discussion alludes to semiotics and the Derridean logic of the supplement. Thus Pound frames his discussion of Hotere's *Black Paintings* of 1968 within the context of a copy of the exhibition catalogue *Ad Reinhardt* (1991), which Hotere selectively annotated with references to the US Masters Golf Tournament of 1997. In an act that is, simultaneously, appropriation and homage, Hotere reframes the rules and syntax of one system of meaning (i.e., *painting*) within the rules and syntax of another system of meaning (i.e., *golf*). Pound's essay reiterates this strategy in using 'Reinhardt's pungent brevities' on painting (as noted in 'ART IN ART IS ART AS ART, *Art-as-Art Dogma, part three*' (1966)) 'as a convenient way in[to]' Hotere's *Black Paintings*.⁵³ Secondly, in its engagement with the koan-like, oppositional binaries of Reinhardt's writing, Pound's approach demonstrates his familiarity with the structuralist/post-structuralist understanding that, in systems of signifying elements, meaning is not a matter of origins and essences but rather emerges by virtue of relations of difference. Thus, Pound organises his catalogue piece under the headings 'Words/no words', 'Material/immaterial', 'Brushwork/no brushwork', 'Repetition/variety', 'Gloss/matt', 'Circle/square', and 'Order/chaos'.⁵⁴ Pound's essay is the subject of further discussion in chapter six.

Wedde's *Landfall* article, 'Figure it Out' (2006) commends itself as worthy of attention as a rare example of writing that, however briefly, summarises and reflects critically on Hotere discourse. Whilst, ostensibly, Wedde's short essay is dedicated to reviewing Kriselle Baker's *The Desire of the Line: Ralph Hotere Figurative Works* (2005), nevertheless, a substantial portion of its discussion addresses the 'myths of reticence and absence of documentation' as they operate in Hotere discourse.⁵⁵ Indeed, I acknowledge that my denomination of the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence' is

⁵³ Pound, 'Tiger Country, Hotere, Reinhardt and the US Masters' in *Ralph Hotere: Black Light*, 15.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24.

⁵⁵ Wedde, 'Figure it Out', 180.

indebted to Wedde who, on a number of occasions, specifically refers to Hotere's 'reticence' with the aim of subverting totalising and reductive rhetoric to the effect that (1) Hotere rarely or never spoke publicly, and (2) Hotere's work is formally autonomous and, therefore, speaks entirely and only in and of itself.⁵⁶ Wedde's writing will merit further attention in chapter six, suffice to say that, in the present context, he observes that Hotere's willingness to 'use quotation and citation' – whether poetry or (on the occasion of the *Zero* exhibition of 1967) the polemical writing of Ad Reinhardt – 'would complicate and make paradoxical his apparent reticence' insofar as this activity constitutes a mutually reciprocating discourse between art and 'the world's traffic of meanings'.⁵⁷

0.4.3 Structuring a thesis: chapter summary

Having established where this project sits in relation to existing scholarship – particularly, the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere – it is timely to outline the thesis structure. This comprises six chapters bounded by a two part Introduction and a Prologue, and a series of Appendices. The six chapters are, as noted earlier, organised into three divisions, entitled Subjectivity, Painting, and Discourse, respectively – each division addressing one of three, primary, thesis questions. However, before presenting a more detailed outline of the main body of this project, it may be useful, briefly, to elaborate its frame. In the first place, the two part Introduction separates the tasks of placing this project within the context of existing scholarship and elaborating its structure from considerations of thesis motivation and methodology. This division of labour serves to underscore the importance, for this study, of the complex nature of desiring subjectivity and to introduce the reader to some key concepts by which Lacanian theory

⁵⁶ See, for example, *ibid*, 'Hotere stunning', *Evening Post*, 26 August 1985, 37, where it is suggested that Hotere's flamboyantly colourful, expressionistic, and politically engaged paintings protesting French, nuclear weapons testing on Mururoa atoll constitute a superseding of his 'reticent lyricism.' See also, *ibid*, 'Where is the art that does this?' in O'Brien, *Hotere, Out The Black Window*, 9, where it is proposed that 'reticence... [may] be a way of leaving space in which the words of others can be heard' and that art evincing this 'respectful homage' may constitute 'narratives of lyrical silence'.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 'Figure it Out', 179.

negotiates this complexity – in particular, the understanding that, both ‘structurally’ and ‘ethically’, the ‘end’ of analysis necessitates ‘traversing fantasy’. Secondly, the thesis Prologue presents a preliminary account of the so-called Lacanian ‘orders’ of *imaginary*, *symbolic*, and *real* – terms to which this study frequently refers. In particular, I devote special attention to an interpretation of the Lacanian real as the order of the impossible, synonymous with, yet inassimilable to, what I call ‘the function of representation/symbolisation’ (i.e., as noted earlier, the *thinking in and as signs* defining language-mediated expressions of subjectivity). This conception of the real is pivotal to a primary thesis theme – namely, the understanding of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making in terms of the *figuring of desire*. Finally, the thesis Appendices contain elaborations of and complementary perspectives on theory (e.g., aspects of the thinking of Heidegger, Derrida, Freud, Saussure, etc.) and other matters (e.g., the question of Lacanian phallogocentrism, the myth of artistic ‘influence’) omitted from the main body of the thesis in order to preserve the flow and focus of discussion. Indeed, insofar as this material presents further exegeses included in order to maximise the potential readership of the thesis, engagement with it may be regarded as optional – useful for some scholars, unnecessary for others.

The first, main thesis section, **Subjectivity**, asks: *what is subjectivity?* From the perspective of arts discourse, this question concerns the nature of the creative ‘agency’ or ‘motivating principle’ in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making that are synonymous with art-making, and the writing and testimony surrounding art-making. In chapter one, I initiate this enquiry by way of a close inspection of McCahon’s *Victory over Death 2* and Hotere’s *Painting from “Malady”* (1970, ref. 15, fig. 3), highlighting the ambiguities and contradictions these works enliven. I propose that the subjectivity expressed in these works is neither simply nor immediately reducible to a particular art subject called ‘McCahon’ or ‘Hotere’, respectively, but rather demands to be conceived in terms of a tension obtaining between the individual and a *transindividual otherness* synonymous with language-mediated, social and cultural reality. These propositions are elaborated through a consideration of a selection of ‘written paintings’ (of which *Victory over Death 2* and *Painting from “Malady”* are examples) in order to underscore, further,

the impossibility of absolutely resolving the ‘other subjectivity’ expressed in these works. In light of this discussion, it is suggested that painting, as an expression of subjectivity/meaning-making, reflects the tension between *one painting* and/or *one meaning* and *an other painting* and/or *an other meaning*. In consequence, the works in question demand consideration as that to which, paradoxically, *one gives meaning* only insofar as *meaning is given to one* by an other (or, to be precise, an otherness) or, equivalently, as expressions of a subjectivity caught between agency and automatism.

In light of the discussion presented in chapter one, the first thesis question may be re-stated as *what is the nature of the subjectivity/meaning-making that manifests as ambiguity and contradiction?* In chapter two, I seek to ameliorate this antinomy by appealing to the Lacanian understanding of subjectivity/meaning-making in terms of a tension between *consciousness* and *the unconscious*. From this standpoint, the first thesis question finally resolves as follows: *what are the structures and laws governing language-mediated expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making such that these expressions evince a tension between consciousness and the unconscious?* The remainder of the chapter presents an interpretation of these structures and laws in light of Lacan’s linguistically-inspired transformation of Freudian psychoanalysis. Thus, anticipating the formulation *figuring of desire*, I present a model of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making in terms of a ‘metaphoric’ *structuring* of a ‘metonymic’ *structure* – which is to say, the manner by which a synchronic metonymy that is unconscious metaphorically *becomes* as a diachronic metonymy in consciousness. The *structure* in question is elucidated with reference to the signifier and signifying chain such that expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making bear witness to a tension between a diachronic sequence of *signifiers-as-meaning/forms* unfolding in consciousness and a synchronic field of *signifiers-as-potentials* that are unconscious. The *structuring* of this structure is elaborated in terms of a psychical function of repression/overdetermination of meaning (or, equivalently, repression and the return of the repressed) in accordance with the laws of metaphor and metonymy. The chapter concludes with the presentation of a preliminary understanding of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making in terms of the agent-like, metaphoric, *precipitation* and automatist, metonymic, *perpetuation of points de capiton*.

Having shed some light on the nature of the subjectivity/meaning-making that manifests as ambiguity and contradiction, in part two of the thesis, **Painting**, I ask: *what is painting considered as an expression or sign of this ambiguous and contradictory subjectivity/meaning-making?* In the process, two, basic questions are posed: *how does the meaning of painting come into being?* and *how is the meaning of painting sustained?* In pursuing these matters, I delve more deeply into what is involved in the precipitation and perpetuation of *points de capiton* with regard to what I refer to as the *painted matter* of *Victory over Death 2*, *Painting from "Malady"*, and related works. Thus, in chapter three, the question of how the meaning of painting comes into being is addressed by way of a more detailed exploration of the agent-like, *metaphoric* dimension of the *precipitation* of *points de capiton* in painting – which I call the *figuring of painting*. This account begins with a consideration of the stutters and negations by which conscious discourse bears witness to figuring as the ‘true’ ‘speaking’ of the so-called ‘subject of the unconscious’, the manifestations of which also are explained in terms of a *writing* in and of the psyche, the ‘materialisation’ of the signifier, and the ‘instance’ or ‘agency’ of the ‘letter’. Drawing on a range of Lacanian texts, I interrogate the ‘materiality’ and ‘agency’ in question in order to show how figuring also defines, variously, the psychical function of meaning repression/overdetermination, writing in and of the real, lettering/tracing/differencing, and the function of ‘pure difference’ proper to the ‘essence of the signifier’ or ‘unary trait’. I apply this analysis to the self-contradictory figure AM I AM in *Victory over Death 2* in order to demonstrate, firstly, that any posited signified or *point de capiton* is destined to ‘fade’ (i.e., evince ambiguity) in the face of the insistent return of repressed ‘identities-in-difference’ or (paraphrasing Žižek) ‘signifiers without signifieds’. Secondly, I show how painted matter defines a simultaneity of painting and writing, plastic and graphic such that grammatical ambiguity insists by virtue of a *space of meaning* and spatial ambiguity insists by virtue of a *grammar of form*.

In light of the suggestion that *points de capiton* precipitate only insofar as they are fading in the face of the insistent return of the repressed, chapter four engages with the problem of how the meaning of painting (or, indeed, *any* expression of

subjectivity/meaning-making) can endure. The ‘solution’ advanced is that the meaning of painting is sustained by virtue of the automatist, *metonymic* dimension of the *perpetuation of points de capiton* in painting – which, in deference to Lacan’s assertion that ‘desire is a metonymy’, I call the *desire of painting*. Here, there is a double proposition to the effect that, firstly, the meaning of painting is perpetuated *as* automatist, metonymic, re-playing of existing meaning, and secondly, this automatism, metonymy and repetition expresses the structure of subjective desire. Addressing the first part of this assertion, I show how, always already, metonymy is conceivable as repetition and, applying this understanding to the painted matter of *Painting from “Malady”* and the *Malady* series, demonstrate that they admit consideration as signs of metonymy-as-repetition that evince, so to speak, two ‘moments’ of repetition. That is to say, signs that mean as *reiterations of the same* and signs that mean only in their ambiguity as *reiterations of the same that is not identical with itself* – which is to say, signs that mean in the form of a serial movement among signifying alternatives. In the latter part of chapter four, I elaborate the structure of subjective desire *as* automatism, metonymy, repetition – which is to say *as* a repetitive movement among signifying alternatives or imaginary surrogates for the primordially lost and/or fundamentally irresolvable ‘object...cause of desire’, *objet petit a*. With particular reference to *Seminar IX*, in which Lacan models subjectivity in terms of the topology of surfaces, I relate what I refer to as the *figuring of desire* (i.e., the reciprocity of metaphor and metonymy in language-mediated expressions of subjectivity) to the so-called ‘formalisation’ of fantasy: $\$ \diamond a$. In so doing, I show how, from a Lacanian perspective, expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making define a structurally necessary counterpoise of possibility and impossibility – unconscious metonymy *becoming* as conscious metonymy defining the order of the possible, and the metaphoric ‘agency’ of this becoming defining the real as the order of the impossible.

In the third thesis division, **Discourse**, I ask: *how may the preceding considerations of subjectivity and painting illuminate certain ambiguities and contradictions appearing in the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere?* In consequence, the focus of my discussion shifts from *painting* and *painted matter* to related *writing* and *testimony*. In

chapter five, these deliberations are threefold. Firstly, I present an elaboration of the figuring of the *written matter* in that part of McCahon discourse addressing *Victory over Death 2* and *I one*. Specifically, I address Zepke's criticism of what he regards as logocentric and ontotheological thinking in Brown's reading of *Victory over Death 2* and Curnow's reading of *I one*. Here, my intention is to illustrate how figuring (i.e., determinations of meaning sustained only insofar as they are fading before that which is repressed/returning) exhibits an open-ended logic such that critical analyses can make no claim to be definitive or final but rather are offered only as that which envisage their own analysis (i.e., re-reading and re-writing) in turn. Secondly, I engage with Hotere's *Malady* series in order to show how, in accordance with the figuring of desire, Hotere discourse and the discourse of art history admit consideration as *discourses of desire*. In particular, I suggest that, insofar as the meaning of 'the *Malady* series' rests on *nothing* other than (in Žižekian parlance) the 'radically contingent' repetition of the name '*Malady*', and to the extent that the discourse of art history concerns itself with the determination of this 'impossible object', one finds an exemplary illustration of the status of the *Malady* series and the discourse of art history as desiring discourses – i.e., as symptoms of subjective desire paradoxically fulfilled through endlessly missing its aim. In the final part of chapter five, I define the parameters of the discussion in chapter six – namely, the consideration of the *points de capiton* 'McCahon's doubt' and 'Hotere's reticence'. In the first place, I acknowledge the limits of this analysis insofar as, necessarily and inevitably, it is a product of conscious idealisation and rationalisation of meaning. Secondly, with regard to the Lacanian model of subjectivity/meaning-making previously elaborated, I outline the contradictions proper to these *points de capiton* – namely, McCahon's dual characterisation as a *visionary and/or a doubter* and Hotere's dual characterisation as *eloquent and/or as reticent*.

Having described the general features of the *points de capiton* 'McCahon's doubt' and 'Hotere's reticence', the final thesis chapter presents a more substantive discussion. Thus, in the first two sections of chapter six, I survey a range of texts in McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse, respectively. My analysis illustrates two basic claims I make in relation to the *points de capiton* 'McCahon's doubt' and 'Hotere's reticence'. In the first

place, I show how these figures testify to the repeated characterisation of McCahon as a visionary *and* a doubter, and of Hotere as eloquent *and* reticent. Secondly, I demonstrate that the perpetuation of the *points de capiton* ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’ tends to privilege the individual art subjects called ‘McCahon’ and ‘Hotere’, respectively – where this privileging is expressed in the priority accorded to McCahon’s *testimony* and/or the visionary quality of his work, and to Hotere’s *silence* and/or the formal autonomy of his work. In the closing section of chapter six, I focus on two special cases of these *points de capiton*: firstly, McCahon’s presentation as a visionary insofar *as* he doubts, on which basis one may posit a contradictory *vision of doubt*, and secondly, Hotere’s presentation as eloquent insofar *as* he is reticent, on which basis one may posit a paradoxically *eloquent reticence*. I demonstrate, further, that these special cases arise in relation to presentations, in McCahon discourse and in Hotere discourse, respectively, of *McCahon’s questioning faith* or *faith in and as a praxis of questioning*, and *Hotere’s effecting discursive silence* or *faith in and as a praxis of silent speech*. Finally, I show how these *praxes of contradiction* are defined by leaps of faith or radically contingent affirmations by which there are sustained fantasises of the revelation of reality and truth. I suggest that the impossibility of objectively realising such fantasies testifies to subjective desire fulfilled in endlessly missing its aim and, by the same token, confronts the ‘one’ who is a ‘subject in becoming’ with the challenge of *being in and as traversing fantasy*.

0.5 Introduction: desiring a thesis, motivation and methodology

0.5.1 Desiring a thesis

Given that the nature of subjective desire is a central concern of the thesis, it seems essential to acknowledge the desire(s) motivating this project, and the methodological approach thereby indicated. I have suggested that the primary objective of the thesis is the generation of some new perspectives on and potentials for the practice of art history and art criticism in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This aim reflects the fact that Aotearoa/New Zealand is where I have lived, it is where I have received my education, and it is where I have had some of my most fascinating experiences of art. To some degree, then, this project proceeds on the basis of a desire – even a sense of obligation – to contribute to the culture of the place where I am (albeit, a place that does not stand alone but is, itself, enmeshed in a wider, global system of artistic and scholarly exchanges) by developing a critical perspective on a part of this culture that is intended to be offered back to this culture. To this end, the thesis is a confluence of various preoccupations: the work of Colin McCahon and Ralph Hotere (and related writing and testimony), the nature of the practice of art history and art criticism (especially in the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand), and the philosophy of art (with particular emphasis on the twentieth century, Continental thinking informing the discourses of psychoanalysis and post-structuralism).

However, in light of the model of subjectivity/meaning-making this study espouses, it is apparent that any accounting of motivating desires is subject to two, key limitations. In the first place, it must be conceded that the disclosures or explanations *I* provide cannot be regarded as definitive or final. On the contrary, it is the position of this project that any assertions of this sort invite interpretation as *conscious* idealisations and rationalisations, whereby the revelation or fabrication of truth and meaning obtains only partially and ambiguously – only by virtue (it will be argued) of the ‘insistence’ or ‘return’ of ‘that’ which is concealed, repressed, or *unconscious*. This first proviso is a matter that will merit more substantive discussion in the main body of the thesis. At present, it suffices to say that it reflects the manner by which psychoanalysis places in question the privileged

status of the *one that is conscious* (i.e., the ‘I’ or ‘ego’). In ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’ (1900), for example, this attitude is apparent in Sigmund Freud’s insistence that ‘It is essential to abandon the overvaluation of the property of being conscious before it becomes possible to form any correct view of the origin of what is mental... The unconscious is the true psychological reality’.⁵⁸ In *Seminar I*, Lacan is even more blunt, characterising the ego as ‘a privileged symptom, the human symptom *par excellence*, the mental illness of man’ and ‘a master of errors, the seat of illusions’.⁵⁹

Secondly, the suggestion that this study is motivated by a sense of duty or responsibility – to the place where I am, to the work of McCahon and Hotere (and related writing and testimony), to scholarly practice *per se* – is, in effect, an admission that, to some degree, the ‘desire of the thesis’ is driven ethically and politically. That is to say, the desire that animates and shapes this project is not to be conceived solely in terms of *my* desire – the desire of an individual. On the contrary, the desire of the thesis is to be defined in terms of an encounter or *tension* obtaining between my individual self and something *other* than myself: e.g., the desires of other people, the desires expressed in other works of scholarship – in short: the imperatives of culture and society. In Lacanian parlance, this complex, desiring, subjectivity expresses the tension obtaining between the individual one that is conscious and a ‘transindividual’ field synonymous with what Lacan refers to as the ‘big Other’ or ‘symbolic order’ – where this Other may be conceived as language-mediated, social and cultural reality, the greater part of which is, practically speaking, repressed from the perspective of consciousness and, therefore,

⁵⁸ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Interpretation of Dreams (second part)’ (1900) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953, hereafter abbreviated SE), v5, 612-13.

⁵⁹ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I. Freud’s Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, ed, Miller, trans John Forrester, with notes by John Forrester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, originally published as *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre I. Les écrits techniques de Freud, 1953-1954* (Paris: Seuil, 1975)), 16, 62.

unconscious.⁶⁰ Again, by way of anticipating matters for later discussion, this second factor also reflects one of Lacan's well-known axioms: 'man's desire is the Other's desire'.⁶¹ Among the possible interpretations this maxim invites are that, firstly, one desires *to be what the other desires* (i.e., one desires recognition or love from the other) and, secondly, one desires *as an other* (i.e., as if one were another person or adopting another person's point of view).⁶²

0.5.2 Fantasising a thesis and traversing the fantasy

On the basis of the preceding discussion, then, psychoanalysis (specifically, its Lacanian incarnation) would seem to insist that the fabrications of the conscious ego are prone to error and illusion and that, furthermore, its basic motivation – not to mention its very means of expressing this motivation (i.e., language) – is bestowed on it by an Other.

⁶⁰ The terms 'transindividual' and 'big Other' will merit further discussion in chapters one and two. For the time being, it is sufficient to observe that the term 'transindividual' appears in Lacan, 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis' in *Écrits* (2006) (originally presented as 'Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse' at the Rome Congress, Institute of Psychology, University of Rome, 26-27 September 1953, and originally published in *La Psychanalyse*, v1, 1956, 81-166), 214. The term 'big Other' appears in *ibid*, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book II. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Miller, trans Sylvana Tomaselli, notes by Forrester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, originally published as *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre II. Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse, 1954-1955* (Paris: Seuil, 1978)), 235-36. The term 'symbolic order' will be addressed in the thesis Prologue.

⁶¹ For some references to Lacan's oft-mentioned assertion that 'man's desire is the Other's desire' see, for example, *ibid*, 'Presentation on Psychical Causality' in *Écrits* (2006) (originally presented as 'Propos sur la causalité psychique' at the Bonneval Conference, 28 September 1946, and originally published in *Evolution Psychiatrique*, v12, n1, 1947), 148, *ibid*, 'Function and Field', 222, *ibid*, 'The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power' in *Écrits* (2006) (originally presented as 'La direction de la cure et les principes de son pouvoir' at the Royaumont Colloquium, 10-13 July 1958, and originally published in *La Psychanalyse*, v6, 1961, 149-206), 525, and *ibid*, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Miller, trans Alan Sheridan (London and New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1998 (1981), originally published as *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre XI. Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1973)), 38, 235.

⁶² For a useful summary of the interpretations of Lacan's formula 'man's desire is the Other's desire', see Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 37-39. For further useful discussion, see Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: between language and jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c.1995), 54.

*One speaks insofar as one is given to speech by the Other of language; one desires insofar as one is given to desire by the Other of desire.*⁶³ At first glance, these stipulations would seem to render impossible the fulfillment of a key demand of scholarship – namely, that *one* take responsibility for making an original contribution to the field of study. If ‘I am’ in error and illusion, and if ‘my’ desire is the Other’s desire, how can ‘I’ make an original, self-motivated contribution to scholarly discourse? What, precisely, is the nature of the contribution ‘I’ can make? Here, the question of methodology arises insofar as what is at stake is the very *possibility* of performing scholarship (i.e., determining truth and meaning) and of assigning responsibility for this performance to *someone*. Relevant, in this regard, is the Lacanian understanding of the ‘end’ of psychoanalysis and the nature of the subjectivity/meaning-making that emerges by virtue of this ‘ending’ – where, in this context, ‘end’ is most efficaciously conceived as ‘purpose’ or ‘ideal’ rather than ‘terminus’ or ‘final resolution’. In seeking to elaborate this end or ending of analysis, two considerations commend themselves as worthy of attention: firstly, Lacan’s interpretation and transformation of Freud’s famous summation of the end of analysis as ‘*Wo Es war, soll ich werden*’ (generally translated, in English, as ‘Where id was, there ego shall be’⁶⁴), and secondly, the idea that the end of analysis involves ‘traversing fantasy’. These enigmatic formulae carry profound implications for the possibility of performing the thesis task (if not scholarship in general) and so, whilst not wanting to prematurely burden the reader with Lacanian arcana, it is necessary to unpack some of their complexity. Let us address each of these propositions in turn.

⁶³ It should be noted that ‘the Other of language’ and ‘the Other of desire’ are not two, distinct ‘Others’ to which the one is subject. Rather, there is only *the* Other – which, always already, is as language-mediated *and* is as desiring. That is to say, from a Lacanian perspective, always already it is the case that language is an expression of desire and desire is that which finds expression in language (albeit, partially, imperfectly, or ambiguously). This reciprocity or simultaneity of language and desire is emphasised in Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 50. Here, Fink asserts that language and desire are ‘warp and woof of the same fabric, language being ridden with desire and desire being inconceivable without language, being made of the very stuff of language.’

⁶⁴ Freud, ‘New Introductory Lectures On Psycho-Analysis, n31, The Dissection of the Psychical Personality’ (1933 (1932)) in SE, v22, 80.

In various contexts, Lacan insists that a more precise rendering of Freud's phrase is ' "Where it was... it is my duty that I come into being" ' (The Freudian Thing (1955)) or ' "Where it was, there must I come to be as a subject" ' (Science and Truth (1966)).⁶⁵ Immediately, one is led to ask: why 'it' and not 'id'? Why 'I' and not 'ego'? In order to grasp Lacan's meaning, it is necessary to tease out the subtleties of these terms. In the first place, then, I would point out that, in the context of the interpretation of Lacanian theory presented in this study, 'it' will bear various names: 'subject of the unconscious', 'lettering/tracing/differencing', 'function of pure difference', 'metaphoric function', 'figuring', and so forth. The key point, in this regard, is that 'it' is neither a metaphysical entity nor an expression of such. Rather, 'it' demands to be understood as 'that' which is synonymous with the aforementioned *tension* between the *conscious one* and the *transindividual Other* of language-mediated, social and cultural reality (the greater part of which is, as previously suggested, repressed and, therefore, *unconscious*). It is by virtue of this tension that *I speak only insofar as I am given to speech* (by the Other of language) and *I desire only insofar as I am given to desire* (by the Other of desire). From this perspective, 'it' also defines what is termed, in the parlance of psychoanalysis, the 'return of the repressed' (the insistent repetition of which defines symptoms), 'unconscious desire' or, indeed, from the perspective of the conscious one, the 'Other's desire'. In short, 'it' is the *structuring of the structure* of desiring subjectivity – the condition of possibility by virtue of which this field comes into being.

What then of 'I'? In this regard, one of Lacan's clearest statements may be found in *Seminar VI* where, as Lacan points out, in Freud's epigram,

...*Ich...* is not *das Ich...* is not the ego, which is an *Ich*, the *Ich* used as subject of the sentence... Where it speaks, namely where a moment before there was something

⁶⁵ See Lacan, 'The Freudian Thing or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis' in *Écrits* (2006) (originally presented as 'La chose freudienne' at the Vienna Neuropsychiatric Clinic, 7 November 1955 and originally published in *Évolution Psychiatrique*, v21, n1, 1956, 225-52), 347-48, and *ibid*, 'Science and Truth' in *Écrits* (2006) (originally presented as the opening class of the seminar of 1965-1966 at the École Normale Supérieure, 1 December 1965 and originally published as 'La science et la vérité' in *Cahiers Pour l'Analyse*, n1, February 1966, 6-28), 734.

which is unconscious desire, I must designate myself there, there I must be this I which is the goal, the end, the term of analysis before it is named, before it is formed, before it is articulated, if indeed it ever is, because as well in the Freudian formula this... 'it must be, this I must become', is the subject of a becoming, of a duty which is proposed to you.⁶⁶

Here, with regard to the idea of the 'end... of analysis', Lacan makes two points of critical importance. Firstly, he suggests that, in a fundamental sense, analysis *has no end*: in the 'final' analysis (so to speak), 'I' am an unattainable ideal – 'the subject of a becoming'. However, secondly, and notwithstanding the impossibility of absolutely realising this objective, Lacan also maintains that, if the aims of psychoanalysis (i.e., the diagnosis and relief of symptoms; the promotion of a heightened awareness in subjects, by which they may be able to achieve practical accommodations with the exigencies of 'their' desire) are to be realised then the *pursuit* of this ideal impresses with ethical necessity. 'I' *must* speak where 'it' (i.e., 'unconscious desire') was. 'I' *must* take responsibility for 'it' – which is to say that 'I', in becoming, also must assume responsibility for what becomes as 'my' desire.

The idea that the end/purpose/ideal of analysis involves a creative act (or, better perhaps, continual process) of self-realisation, whereby one re-defines oneself in relation to the Other, also is implicit in the notion of traversing fantasy. In Lacanian theory, this term first appears in *Seminar XI*, where, with reference to the 'subject who has traversed the radical phantasy', Lacan suggests that 'the experience of the fundamental phantasy becomes the drive.'⁶⁷ What does Lacan mean? Let us begin with the term 'fundamental' or 'radical' fantasy. In *Seminar VIII*, Lacan defines the fundamental fantasy in terms of the subject's investment in, or fixation on, a 'privileged object'. Here, it should be understood at the outset that, insofar as the 'object' in question is imagined or fantasised

⁶⁶ Ibid, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VI. Desire and its Interpretation, 1958-1959*, unpublished transcript in Gallagher (trans), *Jacques Lacan in Ireland, Collected Translations and Papers*, <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book-06-Desire-and-its-interpretation.pdf>, (17.08.12), Seminar 21, 20 May 1959, 264.

⁶⁷ Ibid, *Seminar XI*, 273. Here, Lacan renders 'fantasy' as 'phantasy', in deference to the spelling in the *Standard Edition* of Freud's writings.

in consciousness (i.e., it is a conscious expression of language-mediated subjectivity/meaning-making), it also admits consideration, variously, as an *objective*, *meaning*, *sign*, *symptomatic formation*, or *figure of discourse*. Furthermore, Lacan suggests that, with reference to a fantasy ‘object’ of this kind, the subject halts the ‘infinite slipping... that the signifying fragmentation brings of its own accord into the subject’ and, on this basis, fabricates or sustains an identity or sense of self.⁶⁸ In this context, the term ‘signifying fragmentation’ invites interpretation as yet another metaphor for ‘*Es*’ or ‘it’ – i.e., the aforementioned *tension* between consciousness and the unconscious that is the structuring of the structure or enabling condition of the field of language-mediated subjectivity. The ‘halting’ of the ‘infinite slipping’ of this autonomic ‘signifying fragmentation’ may be understood as being synonymous with the determination or precipitation of meaning. From this perspective, one may understand Lacan’s suggestion that, by virtue of investing in a ‘privileged... [fantasy] object’, it becomes possible to speak one’s desire: ‘desire as such takes on consistency and can be designated’ – albeit, a desire that is ‘rooted... in the unconscious’ and, in consequence, is inevitably ‘posed in the subject as desire of the Other’.⁶⁹

In light of the above discussion, *traversing* the fantasy would seem to involve developing an awareness that, firstly, the privileged object(ive) of one’s desire *is a fantasy*, and secondly, it is a fantasy by which *one* is defined in terms of the desire of an *Other*. That is to say, *one* is only insofar as *one is as divided* by virtue of a tension between self and Other, consciousness and the unconscious. Hypothetically, then, the ‘end’ of analysis would imply the completion of the traversing (or, perhaps, the elimination of the necessity for repeated traverses) and thus the consummation of the process of self-realisation. At the same time, however, insofar as ‘I’ am ‘the subject of a

⁶⁸ Ibid, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII. Transference, 1960-1961*, unpublished transcript in Gallagher (trans), *Jacques Lacan in Ireland, Collected Translations and Papers*, <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/THE-SEMINAR-OF-JACQUES-LACAN-VIII-Draft-21.pdf>, (17.08.12), Seminar 12, 1 March 1961, 145.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

becoming', the ultimate accomplishment of this goal would seem to be an unrealisable ideal. Indeed, in *Seminar XI*, Lacan suggests that this terminus – the 'beyond of analysis' – 'has never been approached' or has 'been approachable only at the level of the analyst' in the so-called 'training analysis... a psycho-analysis that has... specifically traversed the cycle of the analytic experience in its totality... looped this loop to its end', where 'The loop must be run through several times.'⁷⁰ In so doing, the training analysis expresses the imperative Lacan asserts in *Seminar XV*: ' "Where it was... I must become... a psychoanalyst" ' – which is to say, the training analysis bears witness to the transformation of analysand into analyst.⁷¹

However, this is not to suggest that becoming an analyst involves the attainment of one's fantasy objects (or objectives) – i.e., the complete realisation of one's self or, equivalently, the acquisition of total knowledge, incontestable truth, final meaning. On the contrary, in Lacanian theory, it would seem to be the case that, in common with the idealised 'I', a subject perpetually 'in becoming', the analyst is forever 'as arriving' – and, moreover, arriving as a subjectivity divided, lacking, abnegated. In *Seminar XV*, this is evident from Lacan's suggestion that

The term of analysis consists in the fall of the subject supposed to know and his reduction to the arrival of this *o*-object, as cause of the division of the subject which comes in its place.⁷²

Here, it is necessary to elaborate the meaning of the 'subject supposed to know' and the '*o*-object'. With regard to the former term, from the perspective of the analysand, the 'subject supposed to know' is the analyst: analysis proceeds on the basis of the analysand's belief that the analyst has the answer to the analysand's question. More

⁷⁰ Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 273-74.

⁷¹ Ibid, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XV. The Psychoanalytic Act, 1967-1968*, unpublished transcript in Gallagher (trans), *Jacques Lacan in Ireland, Collected Translations and Papers*, <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book-15-The-Psychoanalytical-Act.pdf>, (17.08.12), Seminar 5, 10 January 1968, 4.

⁷² Ibid, 11.

generally, the subject supposed to know implies an investment, on behalf of the analysand, that, in principle and in possibility, there *is* an answer – an ‘end’ to the quest for knowledge, truth and meaning.⁷³ The *o*-object is another name for *objet petit a* – the so-called ‘object... cause of desire’⁷⁴ – a term that will merit more detailed discussion in chapter four. At this stage in the thesis, it suffices to say that, in Lacanian theory, *objet petit a* performs a role similar (although not exactly the same) to the aforementioned ‘*Es*’ or ‘it’. *Objet petit a* is a way of thinking the ‘cause’ of desiring subjectivity (i.e., a subjectivity that is defined in terms of a tension between self and Other, consciousness and the unconscious) in relation to a hypothetical object. In this regard, however, it is crucial to understand that *objet petit a* is not an ‘actual’ object or, indeed, any ‘thing’ at all. ‘It’ is ‘that’ which is posited in order to model the constitutive tension of subjectivity in terms of a desire to recover ‘that’ which *is as* primordially lost and/or to resolve ‘that’ which *is as* fundamentally irreducible (where, in this context, ‘that’ equally may designate an ‘object’, an ‘aim’, a ‘meaning’). The exemplary symptom of this tension is the investment of ones that are conscious in an endless series of privileged, fantasy objects – each of which functions, in effect, as an imaginary surrogate for the ineffable *objet petit a*.

⁷³ The term ‘the subject who is supposed to know (le sujet supposé savoir)’ is introduced in *ibid*, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book IX. Identification, 1961 – 1962*, unpublished transcript in Gallagher (trans), Jacques Lacan in Ireland, Collected Translations and Papers, <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Seminar-IX-Amended-lby-MCL-7.NOV.2011.pdf>, (17.08.12), Seminar 1, 15 November 1961, 10. Here, Lacan’s intention is to unsettle the presupposition that thinking and knowing are, necessarily, predicates of thinking, knowing subjects. This is evident from his consideration of the Cartesian *cogito*, in relation to which Lacan asserts ‘A thought... in no way requires that one thinks about the thought... thinking begins with the unconscious’ (7). Subsequently, Lacan suggests that it is by virtue of an appeal to a subject supposed to know that the ‘philosophical lineage which has developed from what are called Cartesian investigations into the cogito’ invests in the notion of ‘absolute knowledge’ (10). Whilst Lacan does not say this in so many words, I take him to be alluding to the investment made by certain philosophers (Descartes included) in a transcendental guarantor of knowledge (e.g., god) – a subject supposed to know who underwrites and, thereby, makes possible in principle the project of attaining absolute knowledge. For further discussion of the Lacanian conception of the ‘subject supposed to know’ see Evans, 196-98.

⁷⁴ See, for example, *ibid Seminar XI*, ix, 168, 257. For further discussion of the various meanings of this instrumental, Lacanian term, see Evans, 124-26, and Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 83-97.

On the basis of these brief definitions, Lacan's comment implies that the 'term of analysis', by which the analysand becomes as an analyst, involves the 'fall' or 'reduction' of the 'subject supposed to know' (i.e., a subject defined in terms of the positive condition of knowing fully and absolutely) to the 'arrival of the *o*-object... cause of the division of the subject which comes in its place' (i.e., a subject defined negatively in terms of the ineffable cause of the tension/division between self/Other, consciousness/unconscious). Thus, Lacan remarks, further, that

The analysand who has come to the end of analysis in the act, if there is one, which carries him to become a psychoanalyst... [has experienced] this passage... [that] only takes place in the act which puts back in its place the subject supposed to know.

We now see this place where it is because it can be occupied. But it is only occupied in so far as this subject supposed to know... namely, the psychoanalyst... has become this residue, this *o*-object.⁷⁵

Equivalently, one may say that, in becoming an analyst, the analysand ceases to invest in privileged fantasy objects and, instead, invests in the ineffable 'cause' of divided subjectivity *per se*. Instead of seeking 'the answer' to the question of their desire (a seeking that presupposes the existence of an answer or privileged object), the analysand-becoming-analyst seeks to invest in the very *becoming* of divided subjectivity – in the ineffable tension between self/Other, consciousness/unconscious that is condition of possibility for (or that drives) expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making.

In essence, this is the meaning of Lacan's suggestion that, in traversing the 'radical phantasy... the experience of the fundamental phantasy becomes the drive.' With regard to this point, the Lacanian understanding of 'drive' may be elaborated by way of an illustrative contrast with the complementary and closely related concept of desire. As Dylan Evans points out, both the drives and desire are language-mediated – 'they both belong to the field of the Other'. However, whereas desire is, in a sense, undifferentiated, unitary, or entire, the drives are, precisely, differentiated and multiple: 'desire is one

⁷⁵ Ibid, *Seminar XV*, Seminar 5, 10 January 1968, 11.

whereas the drives are many... the drives are the particular (partial) manifestations of a single force called desire'. Furthermore, whilst there is only a single 'object' (or, rather, object-cause) relevant to desire – *objet petit a* – 'this is represented by a variety of partial objects in different partial drives.'⁷⁶ Here, the 'partial objects', to which Evans refers, may be understood as being synonymous with the (potentially endless) series of privileged fantasy objects or imaginary surrogates for *objet petit a* posited in consciousness.⁷⁷

In *Seminar XI*, the relationship between desire and drive is encapsulated in Lacan's invocation of the punning phrase '*la pulsion en fait le tour*' in order to explain the 'place' of '*objet a* cause of desire... in the satisfaction of the drive.' As Lacan points out, '*Tour* is to be understood here with the ambiguity it possesses in French, both *turn*, the limit around which one turns, and *trick*.'⁷⁸ Alan Sheridan, suggests that Lacan's formula implies 'a combination of (1) "the drive moves around the object" and (2) "the drive tricks the object"'.⁷⁹ In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that, from the perspective of consciousness, the 'object' in question is, in effect, a privileged fantasy object, partial object, or imaginary surrogate for *objet petit a*. Therefore, the implication of Lacan's precept is that, firstly, the drive is 'satisfied' merely in the *movement* around

⁷⁶ Evans, 37.

⁷⁷ Support for this interpretation may be found in Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 179-80, where it is suggested that the satisfaction of the drive is to be understood in relation to

...the object that we confuse all too often with that upon which the drive closes – this object... is simply the presence of a hollow, a void, which can be occupied... by any object, and whose agency we know only in the form of the lost object, the *petit a*.

Similarly, in Marie-Hélène Brousse, 'The Drive (II)' in Richard Feldstein, Fink, and Maire Jaanus (eds), *Reading Seminar XI, Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 112, it is asserted: 'any object can be adopted as the drive object, though the drive object is not just any object. The Other's demand determines which object is adopted.' For further discussion of partial drives and partial objects, see Evans, 46-49, 134-35.

⁷⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 168.

⁷⁹ Sheridan, translator's footnote in Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 168, n1.

the posited object of desire without attaining it, and secondly, in so doing, the drive circumvents or compensates for the ineffability of *objet petit a*.

Let us summarise the preceding discussion. In the first place, given the constitutive tension (or structuring of structure) of divided, desiring subjectivity/meaning-making, 'I' – the 'goal' or 'term' of analysis – am a 'subject in becoming' or, indeed, an 'analyst as arriving'. That is to say, 'I', as 'end' of analysis, am an unattainable ideal. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the impossibility of achieving this aim, analysis proceeds in accordance with the imperative that 'I must be' as a subject of knowledge and meaning. From a Lacanian standpoint, the resolution of this antinomy resides in 'traversing fantasy' so that fantasy experience 'becomes the drive'. Here, traversing fantasy implies developing an awareness that one's privileged objects (or imaginary surrogates for *objet petit a*) (1) *are* fantasies and (2) are fantasies by which one is defined in terms of the Other's desire. The suggestion that, in traversing fantasy, fantasy experience becomes the drive implies that the desire to attain fantasy objects (and, thereby, realise or sustain a sense of self) is sublimated into the satisfaction of 'moving' around them. In this regard, further clarity may be achieved if one bears in mind that the term fantasy 'object' also encompasses fantasised 'objectives' or 'meanings'. In the context of discourse, traversing fantasy so that fantasy experience becomes the drive implies that satisfaction is achieved in the very *way* or *means* by which the objective is pursued or, equivalently, in the very *activity* or *movement* of analysis, interpretation, meaning-making. The corollary of desire so sublimated into drive is that the actual attainment of one's objects or aims, the actual determination of meaning in a final or absolute sense and, thereby, the ultimate realisation of one's self, are indefinitely suspended or deferred. To this extent, one may suggest that the 'I' endlessly 'in becoming' or the analyst forever 'as arriving' defines a mode of *being in and as traversing fantasy*.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ In this regard, an illuminating parallel may be drawn with the commentary in Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend', in David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (eds), *Derrida and Différance* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988, originally written 10 July 1983). Here, Derrida denies that deconstruction is either an 'analysis' or a 'critique' (3), suggesting that, on the contrary,

What do these ruminations imply for the ‘desire of the thesis’ and the possibility of an ‘I’ that might make an original and self-motivated contribution to scholarship? I would suggest that, from a psychoanalytic perspective, what is at stake is who or what functions as the analysand and who or what functions as the analyst. In this regard, three complications arise. Firstly, it should be conceded that the institutional settings, conventions, and aims of critical scholarship are not, precisely, synonymous with those of the analytic clinic. The relationship between the scholar and the field of scholarly discourse translates neither simply nor immediately onto the relationship between analyst and analysand. Secondly, on the basis of the previous discussion, the positions of analysand and analyst are rendered ambiguous by the Lacanian understanding that, in undergoing analysis, always already it is the case that the analysand is an analyst-in-becoming who offers to supplant the analyst-that-was. Thirdly, the analyst-who-becomes does so by relinquishing an investment in the subject supposed to know (i.e., the impetus towards the acquisition of total knowledge, incontestable truth, final meaning), reconciling themselves, instead, to an identification with *objet petit a* (i.e., with ‘that’ which is implicated in the very becoming of subjectivity/meaning-making).

With these provisos in mind, as a first approximation, it may be proposed that, in the context of the thesis, ‘I’, as a critical writer, am analysing the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere. From this perspective, I am in the position of the analyst and the discourse (or, more precisely, perhaps, the collectivity of other subjects who have contributed to the discourse) is in the position of the analysand. Applying the Lacanian model of analysis still further, one could say that, in presenting a critique of the discourse, I catalyse the possibility of the analysand traversing fantasy. Here, however,

Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject... *It deconstructs it-self. It can be deconstructed.* [*Ça se déconstruit.*] The “it” [*ça*] is not here an impersonal thing that is opposed to some egological subjectivity. *It is in deconstruction* (the *Littre* says, “to deconstruct it-self [*se déconstruire*]... to lose its construction”). And the “se” of “se déconstruire,” which is not the reflexivity of an ego or a consciousness, bears the whole enigma. (4)

To this extent, one might speak of the mode of *being in and as deconstruction* as a post-structuralist analogue to the psychoanalytic mode of *being in and as traversing fantasy*.

the analogy becomes strained insofar as (1) 'the discourse' is not precisely synonymous with 'a clinical subject' and (2) the presentation of a critique (even one resistant to the idea of final determinations of meaning) is not precisely synonymous with occupying the enigmatic position of *objet petit a*. These limitations notwithstanding, one may suggest that the traversing of fantasy is a possibility for those contributing to the discourse ('contributing', in this context, implying writing and reading the discourse, participating in discursive exchanges) who may be, to some degree, intrigued by the arguments 'I' present and, thereby, encouraged to re-evaluate their positions.

Conversely, it may be suggested that, in my engagements with the discourse, always already, 'I' am in the position of analysand-becoming-analyst, in relation to which it is now the discourse (or, rather, its contributors) that takes the position of 'my' analyst or analysts. In relation to the thesis task, this perspective has two implications. Firstly, in writing the thesis, 'I' am traversing 'my' fantasy. That is to say, I am engaged in developing an awareness of the manner by which I speak/desire only insofar as I am given to speech/desire by an Other. Arriving at this awareness involves the realisation that the factors motivating the writing of the thesis (i.e., the 'desire of the thesis') are not simply reflections of 'my' desire but rather desires defined by the tension obtaining between myself and the field of social, cultural, and institutional structures and imperatives within which I am enmeshed. Therefore, in becoming as an analyst, 'I... must... come to be as a subject' through questioning these structures and imperatives, identifying and critiquing the elements of fantasy therein. Secondly, as an analysand becoming an analyst, always already it is the case that my traversing fantasy is catalysed by an analyst or analysts in turn – namely, contributors to the discourse, to whom the thesis is addressed. In this regard, and in harmony with the status of the thesis as a gesture of a desiring 'subject in becoming', these analysts are (1) *past* contributors to the discourse of whom I have taken cognizance in writing the thesis (i.e., in effect, every artist and writer to whom I refer, directly or indirectly) and (2) *future* contributors to the discourse who will, subsequently, read and critically evaluate the thesis 'I' write.

0.5.3 Aiming a thesis: traversing the fantasies of the traditionalising mode of art history and art criticism

In light of the preceding discussion, the basic aim of the thesis may be defined as follows: to bring a Lacanian perspective to the elaboration and criticism of certain fantasies, symptomatic formations, or figures of discourse inherent in the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere and, by extension, the discourse of art history and art criticism as it is practised in Aotearoa/New Zealand and elsewhere. In so doing, 'I' become as an analyst through (1) catalysing Other traversing of fantasy (i.e., enlivening the possibility of changes of perspective in and of the discourse) *and* (2) being catalysed by the Other in traversing the fantasy *I am given to speak/desire*. Immediately, then, the question arises as to which fantasies, formations, or figures are to be traversed. As previously stated, this project concerns itself with the traversing of two fantasies in McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse, respectively – the various intricacies and inconsistencies of which are subsumed under the headings 'McCahon's doubt' and 'Hotere's reticence'. However, in so doing, the thesis also traverses fantasies intrinsic to what I will refer to as the *traditionalising* mode or methodology of art history and art criticism. In this regard, I should acknowledge that I am appropriating and, to some degree, extending the implications of this term as it is employed, for example, in Jeffrey Sissons' essay 'The Traditionalisation of the Maori Meeting House' (1998). Here, among other things, Sissons defines 'traditionalisation' as

...a process or set of processes through which aspects of contemporary culture come to be regarded as valued survivals from an earlier time. This assumes that there was a time when they were not so regarded – when they were either innovations or taken-for-granted features of daily life.

In consequence, Sissons suggests that Māori meeting houses were not 'invented as traditional' but rather 'were invented forms that **became** traditional'.⁸¹ That is to say,

⁸¹ Jeffrey Sissons, 'The Traditionalisation of the Maori Meeting House', *Oceania*, v69, n1, Anthropology, Maori Tradition and Colonial Process, September 1998, 37 (36-46). Here, I gratefully acknowledge Dr. Barbara Garrie, University of Canterbury Department of Art History and Theory, for bringing this article to my attention.

what is considered ‘traditional’ in the Māori meeting house is not the expression of an inviolable, immutable formula but rather a formula that, in its very implementation, is fabricated, adapted and revised. In other words, the relationship between the formula and the practice is not causal in one direction but rather a mutuality or reciprocity by which, paradoxically, the formula *anticipates* the practice and the practice *retroactively determines* the formula.⁸² Thus, the idea of a tradition is neither necessarily nor inevitably a precondition of cultural production but rather something that emerges in parallel with cultural production. In the context of Sissons’ essay, then, ‘traditionalising’ is the activity of fabricating traditions, lineages, temporal continua, developmental processes, etc.

Extending the term beyond its application in Sissons’ commentary, I would suggest that a traditionalising art history and art criticism involves two primary modes of fantasy or fabrication. Firstly, there is a privileging of particular art subjects (e.g., artists, art writers, art curators, art collectors, etc.) and particular art objects or artworks. That is to say, there is the formation of a *canon* or canons. Secondly, these privileged art subjects and art objects are arranged chronologically in order to illustrate the operation of chains of cause and effect, the transmission of ideas or influences over time, and the progressive development, from points of origin to apotheosis, of artistic *oeuvres* and art movements. That is to say, there is the formation of a *tradition* or traditions. Therefore, traversing the fantasies of a traditionalising art history and art criticism involves *traversing the fantasies of canons and traditions of art*. Here, I should reiterate that, in keeping with Lacanian theory, traversing fantasy involves relinquishing the (ultimately unrealisable) goal of absolute knowledge, incontestable truth, and final meaning. Instead, one invests in the way or *becoming* of meaning-making, interpretation, criticism, and self-realisation. In other words, *being in and as traversing fantasy* (or, from a post-structuralist perspective, *being in and as deconstruction*) is that which would tend to sustain discourse rather than closing it down. In traversing fantasy, ‘I’ becoming where ‘it’ was keeps the discourse open – accepting this open-endedness not only as a logical and structural inevitability but

⁸² By way of pre-empting matters for discussion in chapters two and four, it may be observed that, in Lacanian theory, this counterpoise of anticipation and retroaction is, precisely, synonymous with the manner by which, in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, figures of discourse (or *points de capiton*) precipitate as perpetuated.

also as an ethical necessity. From this perspective, then, traversing the fantasies of the traditionalising mode of art history and art criticism is not a purely negative operation by which the *modus operandi* of fantasising and fabricating canons and traditions of art is to be invalidated.⁸³ Rather, traversing the fantasies of a traditionalising art history and art criticism involves elaborating and resisting applications of this methodology that tend to prematurely and precipitately close down the field of meaning.

As previously stated, from a Lacanian perspective, the *fundamental* fantasy, in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, is the privileging of ‘ones that are conscious’ and, as an important corollary to this privileging, the soliciting of the authority of the ‘subject supposed to know’ (i.e., the tacit appeal made to the idea of ultimate standards, principles, or guarantors of knowledge, truth, and meaning, on which basis, there is an investment in the possibility of acquiring total knowledge, incontestable truth, final meaning). Therefore, traversing the fundamental fantasy of a traditionalising art history and art criticism is a twofold endeavour that entails (1) traversing the fantasy of the one that is conscious and (2) traversing the fantasy of the subject supposed to know. In the former case, it is necessary to identify and critique understandings of artistic production and creativity that, excessively or exclusively, prioritise expressions of ones that are conscious and, thereby, tend to reify contestable notions of artistic originality, authenticity, and genius. In the latter event, it is necessary to identify and critique interpretations of art subjects and art objects that are excessively reductive, simplistic, absolutist, and totalising, and that, in consequence, tend to elide nuance, difference, and complexity.⁸⁴

⁸³ Indeed, I would concede that the traditionalising methodology often may be efficacious in enlivening the possibility of conversations in and of the arts. What may be problematic, *vis à vis* the traditionalising methodology of art history and art criticism (or, indeed, *any* methodology *per se*), is the degree to which investing in or privileging this mode of enquiry is commensurate with obscuring, marginalising, and repressing other voices, other possible conversations, and other methodological approaches.

⁸⁴ By way of providing further clarification of what is implicit in traversing the fundamental fantasy, I would suggest that illuminating parallels may be drawn with Martin Heidegger’s critique of ‘ontotheology’ and Derrida’s critique of ‘logocentrism’. See section 8.2 for further elaboration of these terms.

0.6 Prologue: the Lacanian orders

0.6.1 The psychoanalytic triad of imaginary, symbolic, and real

Given that the thesis makes frequent reference to the so-called Lacanian ‘orders’ of ‘imaginary’, ‘symbolic’, and ‘real’, it seems appropriate to present some account of their significance in the form of a prologue rather than, perhaps, in the thesis appendices (where, originally, this material was located). Moreover, the following discussion devotes special attention to Lacan’s conception of the real given that this is of pivotal importance to one of the primary thesis themes – namely, the presentation of a model of subjectivity understood in terms of the figuring of desire. In general terms, then, it may be noted that Lacan’s characterisation of the terms imaginary, symbolic, and real as ‘orders’ in a triadic scheme of psychoanalytic classification first appears in 1953.⁸⁵ Here, however, it should be appreciated that, throughout the course of Lacan’s writing, and like many other Lacanian concepts, the terms in question undergo shifts in sense and emphasis, and thus resist overly hasty or inflexible explanation. Indeed, before seeking to elucidate the distinctive features of the Lacanian orders, it is necessary to stress their interrelatedness. In *Seminar XXII*, Lacan makes this reciprocity explicit in his invocations of the figure of the Borromean knot.⁸⁶ In consequence, and as commentators like Charles Shepherdson point out, it is untenable to accord ontological or temporal priority to any particular element of the triad. Rather, it is necessary to

⁸⁵ See, for example, Lacan, ‘The topic of the imaginary’ in *Seminar I*, 73-88. Some useful discussion on the Lacanian orders may be found in Evans, 131-32 (the orders *per se*), 82-84 (the imaginary), 159-61 (the real) and 201-03 (the symbolic) and Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 130-38 (the orders *per se*), 138-59 (the imaginary), 162-83 (the symbolic), 183-95 (the real).

⁸⁶ For a reference to Lacan’s appeal to the figure of the Borromean knot see, for example, Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XXII. RSI, 1974 –1975*, unpublished transcript in Gallagher (trans), *Jacques Lacan in Ireland, Collected Translations and Papers*, <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/RSI-Complete-With-Diagrams.pdf>, (29.10.12), Seminar 1, 10 December 1974, 12-20.

...recognize that the imaginary, the symbolic and the real are mutually constitutive – like the rings in the Borromean knot, which provide us with a synchronic and equiprimordial structure linking the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real in a single set of relations.⁸⁷

The entanglement of the Lacanian orders also is emphasised by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan who asserts:

In adult life the three Lacanian categories seem inseparable. They work together to coordinate acts of consciousness, a coordination emanating from the Imaginary order of representations that exists as the interpretative record of the outside world's Symbolic data and of Real effects and events.⁸⁸

That is to say, on the level of consciousness and ego, meaning-making is, in essence, a function of the imaginary. However, the manner of this meaning-making is not arbitrary. On the contrary, it is subject to certain structural laws, certain permissions and prohibitions that are proper to the symbolic order.

0.6.2 Imaginary

As is implicit in the conventional usage of the term, the *imaginary* implies (1) potentially deceptive phenomenal appearances that do not, necessarily, accurately reflect noumenal reality and (2) a mode of meaning-making (i.e., an expression or dimension of subjectivity) that is, similarly, incompatible with reality and truth. As Evans points out, the 'principal illusions of the imaginary are those of wholeness, synthesis, autonomy, duality and, above all, similarity.'⁸⁹ In Lacanian theory, these illusions are particularly evident in the formation and functioning of the conscious ego. In this regard, the key

⁸⁷ Charles Shepherdson, 'The Intimate Alterity of the Real' in *Lacan and the Limits of Language* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008, originally published as 'The Intimate Alterity of the Real. A Response to Reader Commentary on "History and the Real" (*PMC* v5, n2)' in *Postmodern Culture*, v6, n3, May 1996, <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/textonly/issue.596/shepherdson.596>, (03.07.12)), 37.

⁸⁸ Ragland-Sullivan, 130-31.

⁸⁹ Evans, 82.

document is Lacan's essay on 'The Mirror Stage' (1949). Here, Lacan contends that ego formation involves an imaginary (i.e., false, illusory) identification with an 'imago' (i.e., a mirror image of another human being that is perceived/conceived as a gestalt). On the basis of this misidentification or misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) with an other, the infant subject conceives of itself as an ' "ideal-I" ' – i.e., in terms of a false image of self-unity and self-sufficiency.⁹⁰ To be more precise, the *image* of oneself that one sees in the mirror of the other or the mirror of the world may be called the 'ideal ego'. On the basis of this image, one fabricates an *imaginary* 'ego-ideal' – the language-mediated idea of oneself as a self-sufficient unity.⁹¹ Notwithstanding the false or deceptive nature of the ego, Ragland-Sullivan stresses the importance of the imaginary *function* in expressions of subjectivity: 'In Lacan's picture the mind does not control imagination; rather, Imaginary processes are among those that structure the mind through formalizable laws, such as projection and absorption, introjection and expulsion, substitution and displacement...'⁹² To be clear on this point, I would suggest that Ragland-Sullivan's reference to 'formalizable laws' implies that, in 'structuring' the mind, imaginary processes are amenable to *symbolisation*. As Evans puts it, this reflects that fact that 'the imaginary is always already structured by the symbolic order.'⁹³ In other words, subjective experience may be hypothesised in terms of an interweaving of imaginary and symbolic insofar as the rules and structures of the symbolic are immanent in the imaginary synthesis of phenomenal experience. For this reason, it will be convenient, throughout the thesis, to

⁹⁰ Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience' in *Écrits* (2006) (originally presented as 'Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction de Je' at the Sixteenth International Congress of Psychoanalysis, Zurich, 17 July 1949, and originally published in *Écrits* (1966)), 76-78. For some other references to Lacan's insistence that the ego is an 'imaginary function' or 'imaginary construction', see *ibid*, *Seminar II*, 36-37, 52, 243-44, 326.

⁹¹ For a reference to Lacan's employment of the terms 'ego-ideal' and 'ideal ego' see, for example, *ibid*, *Seminar I*, 139-42. For a succinct account of these terms, see Evans, 52. For a more comprehensive discussion, see Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness, A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 19-26.

⁹² Ragland-Sullivan, 138.

⁹³ Evans, 82-83.

refer to expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making in terms of the couple *representation/symbolisation* – that is to say, the *function* according to which language-mediated expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making admit consideration in terms of a *thinking in and of signs*.

0.6.3 Symbolic

As stated above, in relation to expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, the *symbolic* order defines the laws and structures that govern the imaginary ordering of phenomenal experience – in particular the cultural mores that structure social reality and the grammatical/syntactical structures of language. As Evans points out, the symbolic order is, therefore, synonymous with the realm of culture and the Law, and the linguistic domain of the signifier. In the former case, Lacan appeals to structural anthropology – particularly Claude Lévi-Strauss’ conception of the unconscious in terms of a ‘symbolic function’ that structures the giving of gifts and kinship relations. In the latter case, Lacan draws inspiration from the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure – specifically (1) the notion that language is a diacritical system of signs and (2) the conception of the linguistic sign as a bi-univocal unity of signified (concept) and signifier (sound image).⁹⁴

Given that Lacan’s adaptation of Saussure’s linguistics is addressed in chapter two, and that the implications of Saussure’s conception of the linguistic sign and linguistic value are detailed in section 8.6, there is no necessity to reiterate this discussion here. However, it may be useful to present a brief account of Lévi-Strauss’ ‘symbolic function’ and Lacan’s references to it. Relevant, in this regard is the essay ‘The Effectiveness of Symbols’ (1949), where Lévi-Strauss draws parallels between shamanistic, ritual incantation and the methodology of psychoanalysis (i.e., the free-associated speech that is part of the psychoanalytic ‘talking cure’), arguing that ‘In both cases the purpose is to bring to a conscious level conflicts and resistances which have remained unconscious.’⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Ibid, 186, 201-02.

⁹⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, ‘The Effectiveness of Symbols’ in *Structural Anthropology*, trans Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York and London: Basic Books, 1963, 186-205,

Lévi-Strauss goes on to propose that, to the extent shamanism and psychoanalysis are efficacious, they demonstrate how subjects experience trauma less as particular ‘remembered situations’ than ‘immediately as living myth.’ That is, the manner by which trauma, in its ‘appropriate psychological, historical, and social context... is molded by a pre-existing structure’ which is ‘truly atemporal’ and constitutes ‘what we call the unconscious’.⁹⁶ On this basis, in a fashion which has obvious implications for Lacanian theory, Lévi-Strauss suggests:

The unconscious ceases to be the ultimate haven of individual peculiarities – the repository of a unique history which makes each of us an irreplaceable being. It is reducible to a function – the symbolic function, which no doubt is specifically human, and which is carried out according to the same laws among all men, and actually corresponds to the aggregate of these laws.⁹⁷

Moreover, in ‘Language and the Analysis of Social Laws’ (1951), Lévi-Strauss observes that structural linguistics understands ‘linguistic phenomena’ in terms of ‘systems of relations which are the products of unconscious thought processes’ and asks, rhetorically, whether

...all forms of social life are substantially of the same nature – that is, do they consist of systems of behaviour that represent the projection, on the level of conscious and socialised thought, of universal laws which regulate the unconscious activities of the mind?⁹⁸

In support of this idea, Lévi-Strauss points out that laws governing various social mores (e.g., ‘changes in the styles of women’s dress’, ‘marriage rules and kinship systems’) cannot be determined empirically but rather ‘only by treating marriage regulations and

originally published as ‘L’Efficacité symbolique’ in *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions*, v135, n1, 1949, 5-27), 198.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 202.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 202-03.

⁹⁸ Ibid, ‘Language and the Analysis of Social Laws’ in *Structural Anthropology* (originally published in *American Anthropologist*, v53, n2, 1951, 155-63), 58-59.

kinship systems as a kind of language’⁹⁹ In his essay ‘The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis’ (1953), Lacan specifically acknowledges Lévi-Strauss, remarking:

Isn’t it striking that Lévi-Strauss – in suggesting the involvement in myths of language structures and of those social laws that regulate marriage ties and kinship – is already conquering the very terrain in which Freud situates the unconscious.¹⁰⁰

0.6.4 Real

In seeking to elaborate the Lacanian order of the *real*, one might begin with the succinct formula given in Fink’s *The Lacanian Subject*. Here, Fink suggests that it is necessary to consider

...two different levels of the real: (1) a real before the letter, that is, a presymbolic real, which, in the final analysis, is but our own hypothesis... and (2) a real after the letter which is characterised by impasses and impossibilities due to the relations among the elements of the symbolic order itself... that is, which is generated by the symbolic.¹⁰¹

As Fink’s commentary implies, and regardless of how disconcerting this may be to commonsensical ways of thinking, in seeking to understand Lacan’s conception of the real, one must relinquish the idea that it is akin to a Kantian realm of ‘things-in-themselves’ – a kind of fundamental, ‘material substrate’ that gives rise to the world of appearances, even if it cannot be known in and of itself. If one takes seriously Fink’s interpretation then, strictly speaking, pre-linguistic considerations of the real must be considered hypotheses, always already enlivened within the compass of language.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 59-61.

¹⁰⁰ Lacan, ‘Function and Field’, 236. See also *ibid*, *Seminar II*, 29-31.

¹⁰¹ Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 27.

A more technical account of the Lacanian real is presented in Tom Eyers' *Lacan and the Concept of the 'Real'* (2012). Here, Eyers cautions against 'reduc[ing] Lacan's Real to any simple formulae or slogans', stressing, instead, the ambiguity and heterogeneity of this idea within the complex field of Lacan's teaching. This said, Eyers affirms that 'The Real... must be distinguished from any broader concept of "reality" ' or 'biological "need" ' and, indeed, emphasises that his understanding of the Lacanian real 'locates it deep within the contours of... [Lacan's] singular theory of language, an account that privileges the intervention of the sense-less and the "material" as constitutive of signification more generally.'¹⁰² For Eyers, then, the real is implicit in the 'senseless' 'materiality' of language – in 'the material signifier isolated from sense' or, in Lacanian parlance, the ' "letter" ' or ' "unary trait" '.¹⁰³ These enigmatic formulations will merit more detailed discussion in chapter three. For the time being, it suffices to say that, extending Fink's approximation of the real as a *product* of the symbolic order, Eyers proposes that the real is implicated in the *conditions of possibility* for there being language-mediated expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making *per se*.

It may be observed that this understanding of the Lacanian real is, at least, implicit in its paradoxical characterisation as the 'beyond' of representation/symbolisation that is, nevertheless, logically and structurally 'interwoven' with representation/symbolisation – i.e., in the insistence or repetition of symptomatic disturbances. Consider, for example, Ragland-Sullivan's suggestion that

The 'real' Real is both beyond and behind Imaginary perception and Symbolic description. It is an algebraic x, inherently foreclosed from direct apprehension or analysis. The Real, therefore, is that before which the Imaginary falters, and over which the Symbolic stumbles.¹⁰⁴

More succinctly, Michael Lewis opines:

¹⁰² Eyers, 4-5.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Ragland-Sullivan, 188.

The real is the otherness which constitutes the symbolic and the imaginary but is irreducible to and exceeds both.¹⁰⁵

Similarly, Shepherdson suggests that the real is

...an element that does not fit within the imaginary or symbolic structure, that is abjected for the order of images and words, but nevertheless persists in ‘presenting itself.’¹⁰⁶

Finally, in Žižek’s view, the ‘paradox of the Lacanian Real’ resides in its status as

...an entity which, although it does not exist (in the sense of ‘really existing’, taking place in reality), has a series of properties – it exercises a certain structural causality, it can produce a series of effects in the symbolic reality of subjects.¹⁰⁷

These interpretations harmonise with what, in *Seminar XI*, Lacan considers proper to symptomatic phenomena – namely, the ‘*tuché*’ or ‘*encounter with the real*’, where ‘The real is beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs’ (i.e., what, in chapters two and four, is characterised as a prevailing metonymy or compulsion to repeat in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making).¹⁰⁸ Such an encounter is traumatic insofar as it marks a discontinuity in processes of meaning-making – i.e., where the *real*

...form of the unconscious... must... be apprehended in its experience of rupture, between perception and consciousness, in that non-temporal locus... which forces us to posit what Freud calls... *die Idee einer anderer Lokalität*, the idea of another

¹⁰⁵ Michael Lewis, *Derrida and Lacan: Another Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 151.

¹⁰⁶ Shepherdson, 45.

¹⁰⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), 163.

¹⁰⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 53-54.

locality, another space, another scene, *the between of perception and consciousness*.¹⁰⁹

As Žižek suggests, the antinomies intrinsic to the Lacanian real invite interpretation in Hegelian terms as a ‘paradoxical coincidence of opposites’ or ‘the point of the immediate coincidence of... opposite poles... [where] each pole passes immediately into its opposite; each is already in itself its own opposite.’¹¹⁰ In making this observation, Žižek invokes Hegel’s *Science of Logic* (1812-16), wherein Being and Nothingness are considered to subsist in a paradoxical simultaneity of identity *and* difference.¹¹¹ Relevant, in this regard, is Hegel’s assertion that, firstly, ‘pure Being... has no differentiation either within itself or relatively to anything external... It is pure indeterminateness and vacuity’ and thus ‘Being... is Nothing, neither more nor less.’ Secondly, ‘pure Nothing... is simple equality with itself, complete emptiness, without determination or content: undifferentiatedness in itself.’ In other words, ‘Nothing... is the same empty intuition or thought... as pure Being... [it is] the same determination (or rather lack of determination), and thus altogether the same thing, as pure Being.’¹¹² On this basis, Hegel suggests that

Pure Being and pure Nothing are, then, the same; the truth is, not either Being or Nothing, but that Being – not passes – but has passed over into Nothing, and Nothing into Being. But equally the truth is not their lack of distinction, but that they are not the same, that they are absolutely distinct, and yet unseparated and inseparable, each disappearing immediately in its opposite. The truth is therefore this movement, this immediate disappearance of the one into the other, in a word, Becoming; a movement wherein both are distinct, but by virtue of a distinction which has equally immediately dissolved itself.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 56.

¹¹⁰ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 172.

¹¹¹ With regard to the terminology employed in chapter three, one could say that Hegel posits Being and Nothing as expressions enabled by what may be referred to as, variously, the pure difference, lettering/tracing/differencing, trace structure, or identity-in-difference .../Being/Nothing/...

¹¹² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 2 vols, trans W.H. Johnston and L.G. Struthers (London and New York: George Allen & Unwin Ltd and The Macmillan Company, 1961 (1929), originally published as *Wissenschaft der Logik* (Nürnberg: 1812-16), v1, 94.

¹¹³ Ibid, 95.

In other words, the Hegelian ‘real’ is neither Being nor Nothing; it is neither the absolute *identity of* Being and Nothing nor the absolute *difference between* Being and Nothing. Rather, the Hegelian real demands to be understood as the simultaneous identity *and* difference of Being and Nothing – logically speaking, an aporia or impossibility. To this extent, Hegel’s logic resonates with the Lacanian conception of the real in terms of what Žižek refers to as ‘nothing but... [the] impossibility of its inscription’. In consequence, Žižek denies that the real is a ‘transcendent positive entity’ or ‘Kantian “Thing-in-itself” ’ existing outside the symbolic order. On the contrary, the real is ‘in itself... nothing at all, just a void, an emptiness in a symbolic structure marking some central impossibility.’¹¹⁴ In light of this interpretation, and notwithstanding Evers’ caution with regard to reducing the real to ‘simple formulae or slogans’, I would propose that, for the purposes of the present study, the real may be most efficaciously conceived as *the structurally necessary order of the impossible, synonymous with, yet inassimilable to, the function of representation/symbolisation*.¹¹⁵ Equivalently, one may say that the Lacanian real is to be conceived in *logico-structural*, as opposed to *metaphysical*, terms (where, by ‘metaphysical’, I mean that way of thinking reality in terms of substantial, material essences, first causes, or fundamental forces).

In works such as *Seminar II* and the ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter” ’ (1957), this understanding of the real is implicit in the linguistically-inspired thought experiments Lacan employs in order to elucidate the structural logic of the signifying chain. Lacan’s discussion illustrates that the symbolic order, in being constituted in this way, is defined

¹¹⁴ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 173. In support of this interpretation, Žižek appeals to the assertion, in Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX. Encore. The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. Miller, trans with notes by Fink (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999, originally published as *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre XX. Encore, 1972-1973* (Paris: Seuil, 1975)), 93 (cited in Žižek, 172, with a modified translation), that ‘The real can only be inscribed on the basis of an impasse of formalisation.’

¹¹⁵ The implications of this understanding of the Lacanian real are explored in chapters three and four. For further, sophisticated discussion of the complexities and ambiguities surrounding Lacan’s conception of the real, see also Chiesa, 125-38.

in terms of certain permissions and prohibitions, possibilities and impossibilities. That is to say, subjective experience, insofar as it is a function of representation/symbolisation, necessarily emerges (or, better perhaps, demands to be conceived) as a structural simultaneity or counterpoise of possibility and impossibility. It is in this sense that the real, as the structurally necessary order of the impossible, is not prior to the function of representation/symbolisation (*à la* a material substrate) but rather synonymous with *and* inassimilable to it.¹¹⁶

In *Seminar II*, Lacan invokes the game of ‘heads and tails’ in order to emphasise that game-playing – even a game of chance – simply by virtue of *being a game*, is subject to symbolic structuring and conditioning. Choosing ‘heads’ or ‘tails’, and, thereby, winning or losing on the basis of the outcome of the coin toss – these possibilities make no sense unless there is a symbolically mediated enlivening of meaning:

...just by the simple fact of dialogue, even the most blind, no pure game of chance exists, instead there is already the articulation of one word with another. This word is included in the fact that even when the subject plays by himself, his play only has any meaning if he says in advance what he thinks will come out. You can play heads or tails by yourself – there is already the articulation of three signs comprising a win or a loss, and this articulation prefigures the very meaning of the result. In other words, if there is no question, there is no game, if there is no structure there is no question. The question is constituted, organised by the structure.¹¹⁷

In consequence, Lacan suggests that the human subject does not, as it were, formulate or determine the symbolic play of meaning but, on the contrary, always already, is enmeshed within it:

¹¹⁶ This point may be further elaborated in relation to what has been termed the logico-structural, as opposed to the metaphysical, conception of language-mediated expressions of subjectivity or, equivalently, the function of representation/symbolisation. The logico-structural conception of language-mediated expressions of subjectivity inheres in their characterisation *as* a counterpoise or simultaneity of possibility and impossibility. The metaphysical conception of language-mediated expressions of subjectivity inheres in their characterisation in terms of causes and effects such that the order of the possible gives rise to and/or sustains the order of the impossible or, conversely, the order of the impossible gives rise to and/or sustains the order of the possible.

¹¹⁷ Lacan, *Seminar II*, 192.

By itself, the play of the symbol represents and organises, independently of the peculiarities of its human support, this something which is called a subject. The human subject doesn't foment this game, he takes place in it... He is himself an element in this chain which, as soon as it is unwound, organises itself in accordance with laws. Hence the subject is always on several levels, caught up in crisscrossing networks.¹¹⁸

Still further, Lacan insists that the play of the symbol or the play of meaning (i.e., the syntax and grammar of the signifying chain or network) is not at all contingent, but rather subject to certain laws that determine the form in which it is expressed:

Anything from the real can always come out. But once the symbolic chain is constituted, as soon as you introduce a certain significant unity, in the form of unities of succession, what comes out can no longer be just anything.¹¹⁹

Lacan then briefly illustrates these 'unities of succession' by way of a consideration of a simple symbolic structure or network comprised of groups of threes of pluses and minuses:

(1)	(2)	(3)
+	+	+
+	+	-
+	-	+
-	-	-
-	-	+
-	+	+
-	+	-

As Lacan points out, 1s, 2s and 3s *cannot* succeed each other in *any* order. A 1 can never follow a 3. That is to say, in a sequence of 3s, one cannot derive a 1; 1 is prohibited or impossible. Consider, for example, the sequence '+ - + + - + - + - +'. The successions in question obtain by virtue of *reading* this chain as a series of overlapping triplets. Thus, the first triplet, '+ - +', is a 3, the second triplet, '- + +', is a 2, as is the third triplet, '+ + -'. The fourth triplet '+ - +', is another 3, as are the remaining triplets. Clearly, one may

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 192-93.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 193.

extract some 2s and 3s out of this series, but no 1s. Similarly, a 1 is possible only after an even number of 2s – e.g.: ‘+ + - - - +’ contains a 1. Lacan also notes that an indefinite number of 2s is possible between a 1 and a 3. Here, it is important to appreciate that (1) the defining of an ‘alphabet’ that contains only two letters: ‘plus’ and ‘minus’, (2) the determination of ‘words’ comprised of triples of pluses and minuses, and (3) the imposition of a reading rule requiring that chains of words be read as series of overlapping triplets are, in themselves, entirely contingent. The ‘alphabet’ could be extended to include ‘=’ (or any number of other symbols); the ‘words’ could be combinations of different numbers of ‘letters’; different reading rules might be imposed. Nevertheless, in combination, these contingencies precipitate a syntax and a grammar that determines what may be articulated. By means of this simple illustration, Lacan concludes that

From the start, and independently of any attachment to some supposedly causal bond, the symbol already plays, and produces by itself, its necessities, its structures, its organisations.¹²⁰

In the postface to the ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter” ’, Lacan presents a rather more elaborate reiteration of this thought experiment. The precise details of Lacan’s argument need not concern us, suffice to say that, as Fink points out in ‘The Nature of Unconscious Thought or Why No One Ever Reads Lacan’s Postface to the “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’ ” ’ (1996), the impossibilities structurally implicated in the formation and operation of the symbolic order imply that there is

...someThing that is not symbolised and in fact resists symbolization... something “above and beyond” structure, something “outside of” and radically different from or in excess of structure, and which nevertheless can be seen at work “within” structure itself.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Fink, ‘The Nature of Unconscious Thought or Why No One Ever Reads Lacan’s Postface to the “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’ ” ’ in Feldstein, Fink and Jaanus (eds), *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan’s Return to Freud* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 174 (Fink’s paper reworks and elaborates material presented in Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 14-23, 153-72).

Anticipating material to be presented in chapter two, it may be noted that Fink's reference to 'someThing' is an allusion to Lacan's discussion of '*das Ding*' or 'the Thing' in *Seminar VII*, where *das Ding* is defined as 'the beyond-of-the-signified' or 'the Thing' in its 'dumb reality' – i.e., as an expression of the real.¹²² In the postface to the 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"', Lacan employs an equivalent term – the so-called *caput mortuum* of the signifying chain. Furthermore, that Lacan directly links the *caput mortuum* to the compulsion to repeat is evident from opening sentence to the main part of the essay:

My research has led me to the realization that repetition automatism (*Wiederholungszwang*) has its basis in what I have called the *insistence* of the signifying chain.¹²³

That the possible configurations of the signifying chain (i.e., expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making) are, in a sense, *predetermined* by its structural impossibilities is evident from Lacan's assertion that 'the *insistence* which I take to be the essential characteristic of the phenomena of *repetition automatism*'¹²⁴ is the result of a

...subjective trajectory... grounded in the actuality which has the future anterior as its present. The fact that, in the interval of this past that it is already insofar as it projects, a hole opens up that is constituted by a certain *caput mortuum* of the signifier... suffices to make it depend on absence, obliging it to repeat its contour.¹²⁵

¹²² Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. Miller, trans with notes by Dennis Porter (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992, originally published as *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre VII. L'éthique de la psychanalyse, 1959-1960* (Paris: Seuil, 1986)), 54, 55.

¹²³ Ibid, 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"' in *Écrits* (2006) (originally presented as 'Le séminaire sur "La lettre volée"' (1955) and originally published in *La Psychanalyse*, n2, 1957, 1-44), 6.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 39.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 37-38. The literal translation of *caput mortuum* is 'dead head'. In alchemy, the term designates the residual products of distillations or sublimations.

Admittedly, Lacan's prose is difficult to negotiate. However, by 'subjective trajectory', I would suggest that Lacan means the diachronic unfolding of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making. Hence, to speak of a subjective trajectory that is 'grounded in the actuality which has the future anterior as its present' is to imply that, always already, meaning crystallises as that which *will be what it was*. To put the matter equivalently, one might say that, always already, meaning *is* only insofar as it *is again* – i.e., meaning *is as* reiterated. From this perspective, meaning emerges *as* normalised and naturalised, *as* necessary and inevitable – a somewhat counterintuitive idea that merits further discussion in chapters two and four. This is why Lacan suggests that the 'subjective trajectory' is 'already... the interval of this past... as it projects'. Moreover, this projection of subjectivity is synonymous with the opening of a 'hole... constituted by a certain *caput mortuum* of the signifier' – i.e., the structurally necessary real-as-impossibility implicated in the functioning of the signifying chain. Again, this terminology anticipates the discussion in *Seminar VII* – specifically, Lacan's appeal to Martin Heidegger's essay 'The Thing' (1951) in order to illustrate that 'the fashioning of the signifier and the introduction of a gap or a hole in the real is identical.'¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Ibid, *Seminar VII*, 120-21.

Part 1 Subjectivity

Chapter 1 An other painting: on the nature of the subjectivity
expressed in *Victory over Death 2*, *Painting from*
“Malady”, and related works

1.1 I declaimed and O exclaimed: differently ambiguous subjectivities in *Victory over Death 2* and *Painting from “Malady”*

1.1.1 *Victory over Death 2*

‘I AM; that is who I am’ the Judeo-Christian God announces to Moses in certain translations of Exodus (3: 14).¹²⁷ ‘*I think, therefore I am*’ reasons René Descartes in the *Discourse on Method* (1637).¹²⁸ ‘I AM’ Colin McCahon inscribes in the small, eponymous painting dated February 1954 (000828, ref. 16) – thus creating the earliest, surviving example of a trope to be writ large in the now-iconic *Victory over Death 2* and *Gate III* (001186, November – December 1970, ref. 17). In the context of a study investigating the relationship between subjectivity, painting, and discourse, *Victory over Death 2* is of especial interest. At first glance, its major text seems to function as an unequivocal assertion of selfhood or subjectivity: **I AM** it declaims, in black and white (or, at least, in light-toned pigment on a dark background), and in two-metre-tall, block capitals that entirely dominate the right-hand portion of the painting. However, on closer inspection, it is apparent that, to the left of the relatively brightly painted **I AM**, is another **AM**, barely distinguishable from its surroundings. It is as if, in the light of self-consciousness, **I AM** reflects on the occluded and inchoate nature of its being (**AM**), and thereby poses an implicit question: **AM I AM**? Further compounding this ambiguity is the fact that **AM I AM** is, apparently, self-contradictory. Surely, it is given that, in the asking, there exists *one who asks*. How, then, can this ‘one’ doubt its own existence?

¹²⁷ ‘The Old Testament’ in Joint Committee on the New Translation of the Bible, *The New English Bible with Apocrypha* (London: Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1970), 63.

¹²⁸ René Descartes, ‘Discourse on the Method for Conducting One’s Reason Well and for Seeking Truth in the Sciences’ in *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 4th ed, trans Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998, originally published as *Discours de la méthode*, 1637), 18.

In response to this conundrum, it may be suggested that there is *not*, in fact, any *one* that queries ‘its’ existence. That is to say, this enquiry emanates from, or is framed within, a field or context that exceeds and eludes considerations of the *one*. In this regard, it is apparent that the major script in *Victory over Death 2* invites other readings in which the **I** of self-conscious and egocentric subjectivity is potentially elided from questions of being and existence. For example, what is being referred to as the letter **I** lacks the crossbars by which McCahon typically renders the first person pronoun. To this extent it invites interpretation as a rendering of the number ‘1’ or, indeed, as an alphanumeric slash or bar. In consequence, the major text of McCahon’s painting reads as a doubly stated **AM** and **AM**, mediated by a symbolic element that signifies, variously, (I) identity, (1) singularity, or (/) – a mark of punctuation (the slash, retronym, or virgule) that, in itself, ambiguously connotes (1) a difference-within-unity and/or a unity-that-is-differentiated, (2) a space of joining and/or separation, or (3) a choice between alternatives.¹²⁹ It is, therefore, unclear what, precisely, the construction **AM (I, 1, /) AM** implies. Is it a difference between *two beings*, one dark, one light? Is it a difference within *a* being – or, indeed, a difference within *being per se*? That is, for example, the difference between being nothing and being something?

Furthermore, one might extend considerations of *Victory over Death 2*’s **I**-motif beyond the realm of what is conventionally *graphic* into that which seems more ‘purely’ figurative or *plastic*. From this perspective, one may observe that, in locating a stridently vertical, central form within a sweeping, horizontal picture space, McCahon’s painting excites various anthropomorphic and environmental resonances: the human figure

¹²⁹ The manner by which *Victory over Death 2*’s central motif plays on the ambiguity between ‘I’ and ‘1’ is reminiscent of paintings such as *I one* (001358, 27 August 1959, ref. 18, fig. 4) and *One* (000418, May-July 1965, ref. 19). In particular, *I one*’s conjunction of ‘I’, ‘one’, and ‘one’ echoes *Victory over Death 2*’s conjunction of ‘I’, ‘AM’, and ‘AM’. In both works, there is a juxtaposition of singularity and duality such that the singular ‘I’ ‘presides over’ and/or ‘mediates between’ a doubly-stated ‘AM’ and ‘AM’, or ‘one’ and ‘one’. Whilst it is unclear, precisely, what these constructions imply, the very existence of ambiguity encourages the interpretation of these paintings as explorations of the idea that the *singular is dual*: the *one is two*. In the context of the present study, this possibility is of particular significance given that, by way of appeals to Lacanian psychoanalysis, subjectivity will be considered in terms of a dialectical tension between self and other; consciousness and the unconscious; possibility and impossibility. *I one* will merit further discussion in chapter five.

standing erect in the landscape. These figurative/environmental associations are further enlivened in view of the fact that *Victory over Death 2*'s centre-piece also resembles the geometric shapes disposed in the *Gate* paintings of the early 1960s – works that McCahon refers to as syntheses of Auckland's urban landscape.¹³⁰ Moreover, given McCahon's further characterisation of *The Second Gate Series* (001001, 1962, ref. 24) as 'a large-scale statement on Nuclear warfare' wherein 'by...“GATE”... I mean a way through',¹³¹ one may be tempted to interpret *Victory over Death 2*'s pre-eminent motif (insofar as it functions as a barrier/portal between the left and right portions of the painting) as symbolising existential dilemmas and the possibility of transcending them or, indeed, as representing a zone of annihilation or transformation in which matter becomes

¹³⁰ Thus, in McCahon and R.N. O'Reilly, *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition*, exh. cat. (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1972), 29, McCahon refers to three *Gate* series works that

...touched on a usable image based on the South Kaipara Head landscape. The compositions all come from a tree outside our bedroom window, and inner city roofs. The shaped panels come from thinking how good it would be to paint the walls of the Auckland Town Hall. *Gates* all round.

The three works in question correspond to catalogue numbers 42, 43 and 44. These comprise *Upper corners off, the second large gate* (001017, April 1961, ref. 20) (titled *Gate* on this occasion: for corroboration, refer to the *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*, <http://www.mccahon.co.nz/cm001017>, (11.06.14)), *Gate, Waioneke* (001041, March-May 1961, ref. 21) and *Waioneke* (001040, May 1961, ref. 22). All three paintings are of a similar size (~1500mm-1800mm by ~1200mm). The right-hand extremities of *Upper corners off* and *Waioneke* are occupied by large, dark, semi-circular forms. The allusion to shaped panels is a feature of *Upper corners off* and *Gate, Waioneke*. An earlier allusion to the influence of the forms of the urban Auckland environment on the *Gate* paintings and similar works is made in McCahon, 'All the paintings, drawings & prints by Colin McCahon in the gallery's collection', *Auckland City Art Gallery Quarterly*, n44 (double number), 1969, 13. Here, in the entry for *Here I give thanks to Mondrian* (000676, March 1961, ref. 23), McCahon recalls:

The picture reflects the change I felt in shifting from Titirangi with its thick native bush and the view of French Bay to that of the urban environment. This picture belongs to a whole lot of paintings that were, believe it or not, based on the landscape I saw through the bedroom window. This also applies to the *Gate* paintings and it shows the remarkable change that happened in my paintings from what I had been doing in Titirangi to what I did in town.

¹³¹ Ibid in a letter to John Caselberg dated 10 August [1961] and reproduced in Peter Simpson, *Answering hark: McCahon/Caselberg, painter/poet* (Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing, c.2001), 87. As Simpson points out (101, n179), an early reference to this letter is made in Gordon H. Brown, 'With my left hand, I write: A consideration of Colin McCahon's word paintings,' *Ascent*, v1, n4, November 1969, 25.

energy or spirit. As an illuminated form, oriented vertically, *Victory over Death 2*'s white oblong excites yet another pictorial parallel with the *Waterfall* paintings of the mid 1960s – works that McCahon describes, poetically, as 'still silent falls of light'.¹³² In these paintings, the falls of water that are also falls of light enliven the idea of elemental transubstantiation and, on this basis, offer to symbolise the intercourse between matter and spirit, earthly and divine, life and death (or, perhaps, life and afterlife). In the Judeo-Christian context, the juxtaposition of water and light also recalls the imagery of Genesis (the first light breaking over the waters) and thus lends itself, further, to the evocation of divine power and creativity.

1.1.2 *Painting from "Malady"*

In many (if not, in fact, the majority) of McCahon's paintings of the 1970s, the **I**-form (or its truncated, *tau* **T** variant) is pre-eminent.¹³³ In Hotere's *oeuvre*, a similarly prominent place may be accorded to the annular **O** or *zero form*.¹³⁴ In view of this fact, I

¹³² McCahon and O'Reilly, *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition*, 31. The formal resonance is clearly apparent if one compares *Victory over Death 2* with a *Waterfall* series painting like (*Waterfall*) (000452, November 1964, ref. 25) wherein the cascade of pigment takes the form of a diffuse, Newman-esque, vertical strip. The pictorial trope of 'falls of light' is reiterated in various works of the 1970s – notably the trio of paintings bearing the series title *The Days and Nights in the Wilderness* (1971) and works associated with the *Necessary Protection* series (1971-72). The titles/inscriptions bestowed on some pictures further reinforce the visual association. Consider, for example, *The days and nights in the wilderness showing the constant flow of light passing into a dark landscape* (001226, April-June 1971, ref. 26) or *Light falling through a dark landscape* (001250, October 1971, ref. 27).

¹³³ For example, in addition to the aforementioned *The Days and Nights in the Wilderness* and *Necessary Protection* series, **I**- or **T**-forms are prominent in the *Cross* paintings of 1971, the *Jump* paintings of 1973-74, the *Urewera mural* (001411, March-July 1975, ref. 28), the *Noughts and Crosses* series of 1976, the *Angels and Bed* paintings of 1976-77, and the series entitled *Truth from the King Country: Load bearing structures* (1978-79). The *tau* cross is prominent in late works like *A Letter to Hebrews* (001038, October 1979, ref. 29) and implicit in the dashed lines separating blocks of text in some of McCahon's final paintings reproducing text from Ecclesiastes – e.g., *Is there anything of which one can say, look this is new?* (001300, March 1982, ref. 30).

¹³⁴ It should be noted that the annulus is one of a number of fundamental forms that recur in Hotere's painting. Other noteworthy compositional structures include the cruciform or sign of addition, the **X**-shape, and the vertical strip – or series of such, in parallel, to form bands. In many works, the annulus is also repeated to produce a series of concentric circles. An early example is

would suggest that the differently ambiguous subjectivities expressed, respectively, in *Victory over Death 2* and *Painting from “Malady”* admit consideration in terms of the difference between *declaiming* ‘I’ and *exclaiming* ‘O’. It may be observed that, regardless of how these assertions miscarry or are exposed as illusory, declaiming ‘I’ is the characteristic expression of self-empowerment and self-possession. Exclaiming ‘O’, on the contrary, exemplifies the involuntary expression of awe or surprise that testifies precisely to the loss or absence of power and possession.¹³⁵ The **I** declaimed bears witness to an idea of the self as a positive presence from which speech issues. The **O** exclaimed testifies to the idea of the self as a void or negativity from which speech is taken from without. The **I** declaimed *speaks* in and of itself; the **O** exclaimed *is spoken* by that which is external to or other than itself. Hence, if *Victory over Death 2* is ambiguous to the extent that it asserts *and* places in question the privileged status of the **I** or the *one* as ground of subjectivity then *Painting from “Malady”* is paradoxical insofar as it admits consideration as an expression of subjectivity that *has no I* and *has no ground*. That is to say, the **O** exclaimed testifies to the speaking of no *one* or, equivalently, the speaking of an *other* by virtue of which *one is silent*.

Thus, one also might characterise the contradictory nature of the subjectivity associated with *Painting from “Malady”* in terms of the expression of *someone* or *something* who or that is, at the same time, no *one* or no *thing*. The positive aspect of this subjectivity is implicit in the way *Painting from “Malady”*’s sanguineous circle dominates and structures its picture space – a tangible, plastic form that echoes the pride

Untitled (1967, ref. 31). The annulus, whether stated singly or multiply inscribed, subsequently appears in many *Black Paintings* between 1968 and 1977. Consider, for example, *Black Painting* (1969, ref. 32), *Black Painting* (1970, ref. 33), *Port Chalmers Painting No.10* (1972, ref. 34), *Requiem for Tony* (1974, ref. 35), and the large-scale *Godwit/Kuaka* (1977, ref. 36). In the 1980s, the circle-form (usually in a single iteration) is prominent in works such as *No Ordinary Sun* (1984, ref. 37) and several *Mururoa* series paintings (1984-85). Indeed, one also might include the stencilled **O**s present in the text of the *Sangro* and *Polaris* paintings created between 1962 and 1964.

¹³⁵ Here, I should acknowledge that the status of **O** as the exemplary sign of exclamation is noted in O’Brien’s writing on Hotere. See, for example, O’Brien, *Hotere, Out The Black Window*, 90, and *ibid*, ‘Miserere Mitimiti, a meeting place, some reflections on Ralph Hotere and *Out the Black Window*’ in Taberner and Brownson, *Hotere, Seminar Papers from Into the Black*, 16.

of place *Victory over Death 2* accords its central **I**. These positive associations are further reinforced by the status of the circle as a symbol for that which is entire and sufficient unto itself – perfect, continuous, and eternal.¹³⁶ Moreover, in a fashion similar to the geometric centre-piece of *Victory over Death 2*, *Painting from “Malady”*’s pre-eminent motif excites associations with the human figure. This resonance is particularly evident in two small works on paper (apparently produced after the fact of *Painting from “Malady”*): *Portrait – Bill Manhire* (1971, ref. 38) and *Portrait – Bill Manhire* (1971, ref. 39, fig. 5). In these two ink and wash drawings, *Painting from “Malady”*’s circle form is transmogrified into a semi-abstract representation of Manhire’s head, within which, in the form of zig-zags ranked on what invites interpretation as the ruled page of the writer’s ‘mental notebook’, is enclosed a similarly abstracted speech or script.¹³⁷ In light of these works, one is encouraged to consider *Painting from “Malady”* as a portrait of subjectivity in the abstract – its almost fleshy, blood-red discus defining the vessel or field in which subjectivity finds expression (i.e., the cross-section of a head full of words or the **O** of a mouth full of song). In either event, it is significant that what is encountered is not a self-present ego or **I** but rather an impersonal soliloquy. Thus, within *Painting from “Malady”*’s annular horizon, mediated by the normalising and homogenising function of the stencil, unfolds a fifteen-fold reiteration of the ‘same’ **MELODY** – a continuous music that takes place apart from considerations of ‘selfhood’ and that, moreover, seems to possess neither a beginning nor an end. To this extent, *Painting from “Malady”* seems to express a vision of subjectivity that exists apart from first and final

¹³⁶ As noted in *ibid*, ‘Miserere Mitimiti’, 16, in the context of Catholicism, the status of the circle as a symbol of unity and perfection is also evident from its association with the Eucharist.

¹³⁷ One of these ink and wash images (ref. 38) is reproduced, in black and white, as a frontispiece in Manhire and Ralph Hotere, *The Elaboration* (Wellington: Square and Circle, 1972), 8. A brief account of the provenance of these pictures is given in O’Brien, ‘Some Paintings I Am Frequently Asked About’, 27. Here, Manhire recalls that Hotere produced two portraits – ‘a standard dreamy young poet line drawing... then he did this much wilder, murkier, messier image’ – the latter version being that actually employed. O’Brien observes that the line drawing, *Drawing of Bill Manhire* (1972, ref. 40), later appeared on the cover of Manhire, *The Old Man’s Example* (published privately, 1990). A black and white reproduction of *Portrait – Bill Manhire* (ref. 39, fig. 5) appears in O’Brien, *Hotere, Out The Black Window*, 32, whilst colour reproductions of this work feature on the front cover of *Landfall 191*, new series, v4, i1, March 1996 and the frontispiece to Manhire, *Selected Poems* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2012), 2. That this work specifically relates to the *Malady* series paintings is suggested by the inscription ‘MALADY’ at its lower right.

causes: a subjectivity that neither passes in and out of being nor proceeds from one state of being to another, but rather subsists in and as an endless reiteration of the same.

Indeed, in a fashion that further echoes the dual function of *Victory over Death 2*'s centre-piece as both a barrier and 'a way through', as much as *Painting from "Malady"*'s ruby orb positively evokes material presence, it is also a negative non-entity – a conduit or passageway that is, in itself, empty and nothing. This latter aspect is implicit in the way the work's slender annulus truncates several iterations of **MELODY** and thus invites interpretation as an opening onto a background vista of indeterminate extent. The manner by which *Painting from "Malady"*'s primary motif engenders an ambiguous and paradoxical interplay of positive and negative, being and nothingness, also follows from its potential to represent an empty set '()' or '0' – a *zero form*. In this case, the prominence *Painting from "Malady"* accords its glowing circle resonates with a comment Hotere made in relation to the *Zero* series works of 1966 and 1967. Here, Hotere implies that the path to self-realisation lies in reflecting on or being *nothing*: 'The series ZERO may be called an object of visual meditation, the essence of meditation being a personal discovery in a seeming void.'¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Ralph Hotere, *Zero, an exhibition of paintings*, exh. cat. (Auckland: Barry Lett Galleries, 1967), np, courtesy of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, E.H. McCormick Research Library, Artist Files: Ralph Hotere, Folder 4, Exhibition Catalogues, 1960-1974, accessed 6-8.11.13.

1.2 Subjectivity as *transindividual otherness*

1.2.1 The transindividual and other discourse of painting

In seeking to illuminate the nature of subjectivity, painting, discourse, and their interrelationships, the unravelling of the aforementioned ambiguities is a major aim of the thesis. In the context of the present study, and as noted in the thesis Introduction, three, fundamental questions arise, each of which defines one of the main divisions of the thesis: (1) *what is the nature of the subjectivity/meaning-making that manifests as ambiguity and contradiction?*, (2) *what is painting considered as an expression of this ambiguous and contradictory subjectivity?*, and (3) *how may these considerations of subjectivity and painting illuminate the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere?* The thesis privileges *Victory over Death 2* and *Painting from “Malady”* insofar as these works conveniently ‘illustrate’ the complexities these questions enliven (which is not to deny that any number of other paintings might serve equally as well). Consider, for example, the second part of the thesis, where I present an understanding of painting as a language-mediated expression of subjectivity/meaning-making. In this context, the slash or retronym comprising *Victory over Death 2*’s central **I**-form might be understood as a sign for what will be referred to as the metaphoric function of *pure difference* (or *figuring*) that is intrinsic to the precipitation of meaning yet, also, an impossibility fundamentally excluded from the frame of reference of meaning. Analogously, the annulus comprising *Painting from “Malady”*’s **O**-form admits consideration as a sign for what will be referred to as the metonymic function of *repetition* (or *desire*) that is intrinsic to the perpetuation of meaning yet, also, symptomatic of meaning sustained only in its ambiguity in the form of an endless movement among signifying alternatives.

Victory over Death 2 and *Painting from “Malady”* also provide a way to visualise the concerns of the third part of the thesis, where I propose that, in the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere, one may discern two ‘symptomatic formations’ (or *points de capiton*), the intrinsic ambiguities and contradictions of which are subsumed under the rubrics ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’. In this context, the **AM I AM** of

Victory over Death 2, which both asserts and places in question the privileged status of the **I** as ground of subjectivity, admits consideration as an affirmation of the efficacy of what may be referred to as a ‘praxis of questioning’. Analogously, the **O** of *Painting from “Malady”*, which expresses a subjectivity that *has no I* and *has no ground* (or, equivalently, the speaking of an *other* by virtue of which *one is silent*) invites interpretation as an affirmation of the efficacy of what may be referred to as a ‘praxis of silent speech’. The ostensible aim of the praxes in question is the revelation of reality and truth (e.g., of the self, of the relation between self and world, of the being and meaning of the artwork, and so on). However, insofar as the investment in these praxes admits no objective justification, they proceed on the basis of what is, in effect, a radically contingent affirmation or leap of faith. To this extent, *Victory over Death 2* bears witness to the status of ‘McCahon’s doubt’ as a *seeing the unseeable* or, indeed, as a *vision of doubt*, and *Painting from “Malady”* bears witness to the status of ‘Hotere’s reticence’ as a *speaking the unspeakable* or, indeed, as an *eloquent reticence*.

At this point in the thesis, these ideas may seem enigmatic. However, by way of elucidating the conceptual framework within which they sit, I propose to begin with a more detailed elaboration of a key idea introduced in the previous section. Namely, the possibility that expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making are neither simply nor immediately synonymous with the expressions of particular individuals or *subjects*. From this perspective, expressions of subjectivity may be said to define an *intersection* or *tension* between the individual and a domain or field that, in the parlance of Lacanian psychoanalysis, is termed *transindividual*. With regard to the subjectivity expressed in *Victory over Death 2*, *Painting from “Malady”*, and related works, the efficacy – if not the necessity – of taking into account this transindividual dimension may be usefully illustrated by attending to the difficulties that arise if one attempts to attribute this subjectivity exclusively to a particular individual or individuals. These difficulties – and what they imply for considerations of the relationship between subjectivity and painting – form the basis of the following discussion.

In seeking to justify the idea that expressions of subjectivity admit a transindividual dimension, it may be noted that no painting is created in a vacuum. Always already, artists who paint operate within a wider context of *others* or, to be more precise, an *otherness*. This otherness encompasses the cosmos of other painters, paintings, fabricators of art media, techniques of painting, schools of painting, dealers in painting, consumers of painting, public and private collections of painting, histories and criticism of painting, theories about painting, and so forth. This is not a new idea. In the context of art theory and art criticism, it is exemplified by Arthur Danto's contention, in 'The Artworld' (1964), that 'To see something as art requires something the eye cannot de[s]cry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld' where, moreover, 'the role of artistic theories, these days as always... [is] to make the artworld, and art, possible.'¹³⁹ Danto's ideas are revisited and extended in the writing of

¹³⁹ Arthur Danto, 'The Artworld,' *Journal of Philosophy*, v61, n19, 1964, 580, 581.

By way of anticipating matters for discussion in later chapters, it may be noted that, in the final analysis, Danto suggests that art is defined by nothing other than the '*is of artistic identification*' (576-77). Danto illustrates this idea with reference to Andy Warhol's *Brillo boxes* (1964), suggesting that the distinction between Brillo boxes in the artworld and in the real world 'is but a matter of choice... and the Brillo box of the artworld may be just the Brillo box of the real one, separated and united by the *is* of artistic identification' (582). In other words, art is what we say it is. Nevertheless, Danto also observes that, whilst, in the first instance, these acts of designation may be entirely contingent, they engender various permissions and prohibitions. Danto elaborates this idea in two ways. Firstly, he refers to two, identical, hypothetical artworks entitled *Newton's First Law* and *Newton's Third Law* (both of which comprise rectangular fields divided by a central, horizontal line). As Danto points out, the title of the first work requires one to consider its horizontal feature as the path of an isolated particle in empty space, whilst the title of the second work demands one to conceive its horizontal line as a boundary between two opposing masses. In Danto's view, this demonstrates

...how one artistic identification engenders another artistic identification, and how, consistently with a given identification, we are *required* to give others and *precluded* from still others... (578)

Secondly, Danto makes reference to a so-called 'style matrix' constructed from 'art-relevant predicates', the choice of which is entirely fortuitous. As Danto points out, the rows of this style matrix, composed of chosen art-relevant predicates and their opposites, enliven that which, at a particular time, it is possible to call 'art' (even if, as Danto relates, some of these possibilities may be unacknowledged and unrealised). Thus, defining '*G*' as ' "is representational" ' and '*F*' as ' "is expressionist" ', Danto finds:

George Dickie – notably Dickie’s book, *Aesthetics: an introduction* (1971), where it is suggested that

A work of art... is 1) an artifact 2) upon which some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld) has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation.¹⁴⁰

<i>F</i>	<i>G</i>
+	+
+	-
-	+
-	-

such that + + = ‘representational expressionistic (e.g., Fauvism)’, + - = ‘representational nonexpressionistic (Ingres)’, - + = ‘nonrepresentational expressionistic (Abstract Expressionism)’, - - = ‘nonrepresentational nonexpressionistic (hard-edge abstraction)’. Danto observes, further, that ‘as we add art-relevant predicates, we increase the number of available styles at the rate of 2ⁿ.’ Whilst Danto allows that what may be chosen as an art-relevant predicate is difficult to predict in advance, if

...an artist determines that *H* shall henceforth be artistically relevant for his paintings... Then, in fact, both *H* and non-*H* become artistically relevant for all painting, and if his is the first and only painting that is *H*, every other painting in existence... [retroactively] becomes non-*H*, and the entire community of paintings is enriched... (583)

Danto’s commentary resonates with the concerns of the present study on several levels. Firstly, to the extent Danto’s ‘*is of artistic identification*’ expresses sheer contingency, it parallels what, in Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 97, is termed the ‘radical contingency of naming’. Secondly, insofar as Danto’s ‘*is of artistic identification*’ engenders various permissions and prohibitions, it harmonises with Lacan’s elucidation of the structural logic of the signifying chain in terms of a structurally necessary counterpoise of possibility and impossibility (see the thesis Prologue). Thirdly, Danto’s illustration of the ‘retroactive enrichment of the entities in the artworld’ (ibid) bears comparison with what, in Lacanian terms, is characterised as the temporally complex *anticipation* and *retroactive determination* of meaning associated with the precipitation of *points de capiton*. That is to say, the manner by which the emergence of meaning is synonymous with a complete reconfiguration of the field of meaning (where, practically speaking, the greater ‘part’ of this field is repressed and, therefore, unconscious). This aspect of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making will merit more detailed discussion in chapters two and four.

¹⁴⁰ George Dickie, ‘Art as a Social Institution’ in *Aesthetics: an introduction* (Indianapolis: Pegasus, 1971, Dickie’s essay reworks ideas originally presented in Dickie, ‘Defining Art’, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, v6, n3, July 1969, 253-56), 101. Of particular relevance for this project is the ambiguity that, in Dickie’s account, surrounds the powers and prerogatives of the individual art subject. Thus, Dickie admits that ‘There is, of course, no guarantee that *one* can always *know* whether something is a candidate for appreciation’ (102, my italics) and yet, also, contends that ‘only one person is required to act... as an agent of the artworld and to confer the status of candidate for appreciation’ (103). I would suggest that the ambiguity in question may be

The respective *oeuvres* of McCahon and Hotere, with their various thematic and formal features, are enmeshed within this ‘artworld’ – an encompassing, transindividual field, which also may be termed the *discourse* of painting. Considered in their transindividual aspect, then, the expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making that constitute the discourse of painting invite interpretation as expressions of *an other painting* and/or *an other meaning*.

Here, it may be noted that Lacanian theory is not alone in positing a transindividual dimension of human experience. In the context of literary criticism, one of the most familiar presentations of the transindividual standpoint is Barthes’ insistence, in ‘The Death of the Author’ (1968), that ‘it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality... to reach that point where only language acts, “performs” and not “me”.’ Barthes contends that this ‘suppressing... [of] the author in the interests of writing’ is ‘to restore the place of the reader’.¹⁴¹ However, from Barthes’ perspective, it would seem that the ‘reader’ thus reinstated is neither a fullness nor a self-sufficiency but, on the contrary, merely a function *of* language – a ‘subject’ that is ‘empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it’ and which ‘suffices to make language “hold together”, suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it’ (i.e., the Barthesian ‘subject’ or ‘reader’ names nothing more than the ‘place’ or ‘field’ within which the possibilities of language are materialised or through which, as it were, language *speaks*).¹⁴² Barthes concludes, therefore, that ‘The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost’ so that

ameliorated if the locus of knowledge and agency is understood to reside in the intersection between the individual and the artworld. That is to say, if the artworld is considered to be that transindividual field of subjectivity in relation to which the knowledge *that* something is a work of art – and, indeed, the *power to confer* on something the status ‘candidate for appreciation’ – is *given to one*.

¹⁴¹ Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author,’ *Image-Music-Text*, trans Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977, originally published as ‘La mort de l’auteur,’ *Manteia* n5, 1968), 143.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 145.

...a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted.¹⁴³

In light of these deliberations, the subjectivity expressed in *Victory over Death 2*, *Painting from "Malady"*, and related works would appear to be neither simply nor immediately synonymous with the expressions of particular individuals but rather defined in terms of a tension obtaining between the individual and a *transindividual otherness*. The transindividual and other dimension of subjectivity defines the transindividual discourse of 'other painting' and 'other meaning' taking place within the field of language-mediated, social and cultural reality. Barthes conceives of this *transindividual otherness* in terms of 'language which speaks' in the impersonal 'space' of the 'reader' whilst, in Lacanian parlance, this transindividual field is termed, variously, the 'big Other', 'symbolic order', or 'signifying chain' – the greater part of which is, practically speaking (i.e., from the perspective of the conscious individual), repressed and, therefore, unconscious.¹⁴⁴

1.2.2 Reference and resemblance

As previously suggested, the efficacy or necessity of taking into account the transindividual and other dimension of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making may be illustrated through a consideration of the manner by which there miscarries any attempted delimitation of the discourse of painting exclusively in terms of the actions or intentions of individuals. In the context of a traditionalising art history, these determinations are implicit in the positing of artistic 'sources' or 'influences'. To recall

¹⁴³ Ibid, 148.

¹⁴⁴ Whilst a more nuanced consideration of this matter must await a future project, I would suggest that certain, illuminating resonances also obtain between the Lacanian conception of the 'big Other', 'symbolic order', or 'signifying chain', and Derrida's psychoanalytically flavoured conception of the 'archive'. For further discussion of this point, see section 8.2.

the discussion in the thesis Introduction, particularly relevant, in this regard, is Simmons' essay ' "after Titian" '. Here, Simmons suggests that art history has inadequately understood the 'intertextuality' of artworks and that, in consequence:

Art History, until recently, has almost always proceeded by attempting to identify a painting's intertext(s) through the bugbear of influence or by examining relationships with other works, other texts, of the same artist in terms of a chain of cause and effect.¹⁴⁵

Conjectures of this sort appeal to the idea that particular works and artists under consideration relate to and *reference* other particular works and artists. Given that painting is a *visual* medium, in the first instance, referencing typically involves an appeal to formal, plastic, stylistic and figurative *resemblances* where, to a greater or lesser degree, works created at a later time are considered to reproduce elements visible in works created earlier.¹⁴⁶ For example, from this perspective, the close correspondence between Vincent Van Gogh's oil-on-canvas painting *Flowering Plum Tree* (1887, ref. 41) and Utagawa Hiroshige's *ukiyo-e*, woodblock print *The Plum Garden in Kameido* (1856-58, ref. 42) implies that, in some sense, Hiroshige's print influenced (i.e., *caused* the creation of) Van Gogh's painting. On this basis, one might be inclined to posit Hiroshige as the particular, other subject who finds expression in Van Gogh's painting. However, questions of sources and influences then arise in relation to Hiroshige's print. Notwithstanding the dubious status of the notion of a 'chain of artistic causes', the implication is that Hiroshige's print cannot be the 'first cause' of Van Gogh's painting.

¹⁴⁵ Simmons, ' "after Titian" ', 100. See section 8.3 for further discussion of the problematic nature of artistic 'influence' – particularly in relation to the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere.

¹⁴⁶ It should be noted that (in keeping with many dictionary definitions) the resemblances in question are typically conceived exclusively in positive terms as relations of *similarity*. However, more rigorously, it is evident that the very idea of 'resemblance' implies a relation of similarity that is *not* identical – i.e., a relation of similarity that is, *at the same time*, a relation of *difference*. To reiterate a distinction made in the thesis Introduction, it may be apparent that, in seeking to absolutely determine meaning on the basis of 'positive' resemblances or identifications, the former conception of resemblance bears the taint of ontotheological and/or logocentric prejudices. The latter, 'negative', conception of resemblance is more in keeping with the perspectives of Derridean post-structuralism and Lacanian psychoanalysis – i.e., by way of the lessons of structural linguistics, meaning is understood to be a function of relations of difference.

Rather, Hiroshige's print must be regarded merely as the most proximate cause in a series that extends into the past in an indefinite regression. Hence, the subjectivity that finds expression in *Flowering Plum Tree* would appear to be neither *solely* Van Gogh's nor *solely* Hiroshige's but rather a *collective* subjectivity that resists precise determination.

Compounding this point is the fact that the degree of pictorial abstraction present in *Victory over Death 2*, *Painting from "Malady"*, and related works would appear to preclude the possibility of defining precise resemblances *per se*. It is certainly the case that *Victory over Death 2*'s un-stretched canvas, expansive, panoramic scale, near-monochromatic tonality, and incorporation of a prominent, central, geometric motif resonates with, respectively, the scroll paintings of Tomioka Tessai, certain Abstract Expressionist works by the likes of Mark Rothko or Barnett Newman, or variations on cubism in the paintings of Piet Mondrian. In a similar fashion, *Painting from "Malady"*'s uniform black ground, prominent (circular), geometric form, passages of expressive brushwork, and incorporation of stencilled text excites comparisons with, respectively, the *Black Paintings* of Ad Reinhardt, certain Suprematist works by Kasimir Malevich, the use of circular 'targets' and stencilled text in the paintings of Jasper Johns, and even the imagery of autumnal moons in nineteenth century, *ukiyo-e*, woodblock prints. However, the fact remains that these correspondences are far from exact and, moreover, countered by significant differences (e.g., there is no equivalent for *Victory over Death 2*'s extensive painted calligraphy in the work of artists like Rothko and Newman; *Painting from "Malady"*'s pre-eminent annulus and stencilled text has no equivalent in the work of Reinhardt). Indeed, it is clear that, in the realm of abstract painting, the game of drawing comparisons admits such a degree of latitude as to be extended indefinitely. In other words, even restricting one's field of reference only to *formal* resemblance, the array of possible candidates that may be 'implicated' in the creation of *Victory over Death 2*, *Painting from "Malady"*, and related works is, potentially, without limit. Hence, the effort to determine *particular* other artists and paintings that might qualify as 'first causes' or 'grounds' for the works in question is confounded by the intractable complexity of a field that, in the final analysis, resists any definitive reduction or discrimination.

In seeking to limit the field of possible correspondences, one might extend considerations further than what is visibly manifest in artworks and appeal to artists' testimony or other documentation in which gestures are made towards artistic 'sources'. Consider, for example, those of McCahon's paintings titled in acknowledgement of other artists: *Entombment (after Titian)*, *Here I give thanks to Mondrian*, *Jump E19*, *To Tomioka Tessai* (000946, 1974, ref. 43) – not to mention those references to Titian, Mondrian, and many other artists in autobiographical accounts of McCahon's work.¹⁴⁷ Although there exists no Hotere painting with a title like *Here I give thanks to Reinhardt*, the catalogue accompanying Hotere's exhibition *Zero* (1967) does reproduce a substantial excerpt from Reinhardt's *Art-as-art-dogma* lecture of 1964.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, as Pound observes, much later, Hotere presented his dealer, Sue Crockford, with a copy of a Reinhardt exhibition catalogue annotated with references to the US Masters Golf

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, McCahon, 'Beginnings, 10. Colin McCahon,' *Landfall*, i80, v20, n4, December 1966, 361-62 (cubism, Mary Cockburn-Mercer, Russell Flint, Laura Knight, Frances Hodgkins), 364 (Toss Woollaston, R.N. Field) and *ibid*, 'All the paintings, drawings & prints by Colin McCahon', 13-14 (Mondrian). See also McCahon and O'Reilly, *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition*, 18 (Titian), 21 (Mary Cockburn-Mercer), 23 (Turner), 27 (Van Gogh), 28 (Mondrian, Bellini, Michelangelo), 29 (Mondrian), 31 (William Hodges, 'Japanese and Chinese painting'), 32 (Richard Killeen), 33 (Van Gogh), 37-38 (Mondrian).

¹⁴⁸ Hotere, *Zero, an exhibition of paintings*. Hotere reproduces a substantial excerpt from Ad Reinhardt, *Art-as-art-dogma*, lecture presented at the ICA Gallery, London, 28 May 1964. The piece in question derives from Ad Reinhardt, *Who Is Responsible For Ugliness*, lecture presented at the First Conference of Aesthetic Responsibility in New York City, American Institute of Architects, 3 April 1962. For references to the provenance of this text see Barbara Rose, *Art-as-Art, The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt* (New York: The Viking Press, 1975, 164-65, and Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, *Ad Reinhardt papers, 1927-1968, Series 3: Writings and Notes, circa 1953-1966 (Box 2, Folder 34)*, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Draft-Writings-and-Notes--250395>, (30.05.13).

Moreover, in Pound, 'Tiger Country', 15, n5, it is suggested that Hotere's 'first exhibition of black paintings' (*Black Paintings/68* at the Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland, 19-30 August 1968) also was accompanied by a 'Reinhardt statement' in the form of a 'hand-out and wall-text' – although Pound is unable to provide any material evidence for this gesture beyond an appeal to the recollection of a collector of Hotere's work: Bill Cocker. In the context of Hotere's career, these presentations of what amount to artistic manifestos, largely constructed from the writings of another artist, are unrepeatable. This said, the general strategy of expressing 'oneself' in the words of 'another' is the very *modus operandi* operating in those of Hotere's paintings incorporating text composed by New Zealand poets.

Tournament of 1997.¹⁴⁹ Whilst it would be precipitate to discount this evidence out of hand, this study takes the position that, in according these gestures special priority, individual artists are privileged as the exemplary points of reference that ground definitive understandings of their work. Indeed, this tendency to seek a definitive ground or basis for understanding by way of appeals to ‘ultimate authorities’ exemplifies the traditionalising mode of art history.

Instead, in the context of the present discussion, I would suggest that what is of more immediate significance, *vis à vis* appeals to the testimony and documentation surrounding artworks, is the demonstration of the fact that *references* are, neither necessarily nor sufficiently, conceivable *only* in plastic or pictorial terms. That is to say, the very idea of ‘reference’ implies a resemblance of *meaning* as well as a resemblance of *form*. In consequence, one is encouraged to understand reference as that which operates in a field wherein forms *mean* and meanings *form*. By way of anticipating discussion in later chapters, one may say that reference operates in a field of *meaning/forms* or, in the jargon of structural linguistics, *signs* or *signifiers*.¹⁵⁰ Equivalently, reference is that which

¹⁴⁹ For details of Hotere’s modification of a Reinhardt catalogue (thus transforming it into a Hotere ‘readymade’), see *ibid*, ‘Tiger Country’, 10-11, 15. The catalogue in question comprises a copy of Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and Museum of Modern Art, New York, *Ad Reinhardt*, exh. cat. (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), annotated, in silver ink, with references to the US Masters Tournament held at the Augusta National Golf Club in April 1997.

¹⁵⁰ I should acknowledge that the expression ‘meaning/form’ is employed in Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, originally published as *La vérité en peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978)). Derrida employs this term in order to expose a ‘conceptual opposition which has traditionally served to comprehend art’ – namely, ‘the opposition between meaning, as inner content, and form’ (21). Derrida’s point is that, always already, questions concerned with the ‘origin’ or ‘meaning’ of art or artworks presuppose an absolute separation of meaning and form. In consequence, in seeking to answer the question ‘“What is the meaning of art?”... one would be seeking a one-and-naked meaning [*un sens un et nu*] which would inform from the inside, like a content, while distinguishing itself from the forms which it informs’ (21-22). Derrida goes on to suggest that

In order to think art in general, one thus accredits a series of oppositions (meaning/form, inside outside, content/container, signified/signifier, represented/representer, etc.) which, precisely, structure the traditional interpretation of works of art. One makes of art in general an object in which one claims to distinguish an inner meaning, the invariant, and a multiplicity of external variations *through* which, as though through so many veils, one would try to see of restore the true, full, originary meaning: one, naked. (22)

operates in a field of meaning/forms as a function of *representation/symbolisation* wherein there obtains an inextricable entanglement of the plastic/pictorial and the linguistic/symbolic.

Consider, for example, a painting of a cat. This is, *at the same time*, a pictorial, mimetic, phenomenal representation of a cat *and* a symbol that means ‘this cat’ (or ‘cats in general’ – or, possibly, a great many other things such as ‘cute creature’, ‘family pet’, ‘furry feline’, ‘nocturnal carnivore’, and so on, *ad nauseum*). Here, it may be objected that, in the case of a ‘purely’ abstract or non-objective painting, there is neither mimesis nor symbolisation: a work of this kind neither *represents phenomena* nor *conveys meaning*. This is, precisely, the position of those who subscribe to the notion of the formal autonomy of the artwork – the idea that, entirely and sufficiently, the artwork *is* in and of itself. In consequence, the artwork ‘means’ nothing beyond the fact of its existence. Relevant, in this regard, is Clive Bell’s well-known proposition that ‘to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions.’¹⁵¹ Also noteworthy is the ideal that Clement Greenberg characterises as the avant-gardist ‘search of the absolute’, wherein:

The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms... something *given*, increate, independent of meanings,

In the context of *The Truth in Painting*, the retronym placed between ‘meaning’ and ‘form’ signifies their absolute opposition or separation. However, as previously suggested, in the context of the present study (and in a fashion that is entirely in harmony with the impetus of Derrida’s argument), I will use the retronym to signify a difference-within-unity and/or a unity-that-is-differentiated. That is say, by way of anticipating matters for further discussion in chapter three, to signify the different aspects of an ‘identity-in-difference’ (whether this identity-in-difference is a *duality* or a higher order *multiplicity*) that does not admit divisibility on the basis of this differentiation. In Derridean terms, this identity-in-difference corresponds to what might be called a ‘trace structure’ or ‘field of pure difference’ – something that, quite literally, exceeds and eludes linguistic determination, always already, presencing as absence, appearing as disappeared. Hence, my employment of expressions like ‘meaning/form’ is merely illustrative – intended as an allusion to the structure of traces, on which basis is enlivened the very possibility of determining problematic (and, ultimately, unsustainable) oppositions such as ‘meaning’ vs ‘form’.

¹⁵¹ Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1914), 25.

similar, or original. Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or part to anything not itself.¹⁵²

However, it should be evident that, in seeking to understand artworks as (1) expressions of subjectivity, where (2) the subjectivity in question admits consideration in terms of a transindividual otherness, this study rejects the idea of formal autonomy. On the contrary, as an expression or *sign* of subjectivity, painting *per se* demands to be considered as a form of meaning-making (or, as I shall propose in Part 2 of the thesis, a *figuring of desire*). On the basis of this definition, there is no painting, however abstract, that means nothing or refers to nothing. Always already, considerations of particular paintings imply subjective investments of meaning ‘into’ the work from positions ‘other than’ or ‘outside’ the work. Indeed, to anticipate matters for later discussion, the *activity* of painting, insofar as it expresses the transindividual and other dimension of subjectivity, would appear to be that which exceeds and eludes metaphysical categories and oppositions such as ‘inside/outside’, ‘subject/object’. Therefore, the question is not *whether* but rather *how* and *what* painting means – although, this is not to suggest that the question admits any final resolution.

Moreover, it may be apparent that taking cognizance of the signifying dimension of painting only further compounds the difficulty in determining precise references on the basis of resemblance. How is this so? Firstly, in the field of painting, abstract or otherwise, it is necessary to identify or define those features that are symbolic. In principle, *anything* potentially qualifies as such – either ‘in’ the materiality or space of a painting *per se*, or bearing some relation between that which is material and/or pictorial and a wider context. Here, the suggestion is that which qualifies as a symbol potentially transcends what is ‘in’ and ‘of’ a painting. For example, one may identify as symbolic or meaningful the *relationship* obtaining between a painting and its frame, between a painting and the space of its installation, between a painting and an *oeuvre* or selection of other paintings – in fact, between a painting and anything at all. Secondly, having selected some feature or concatenation of features that might qualify as a symbol, one is

¹⁵² Clement Greenberg, ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’, *Partisan Review*, v6, n5, Fall 1939, 36.

challenged to determine what the symbol represents, refers to, or means. With regard to the works under consideration, the ambiguity of meaning already encountered *vis à vis* the **I**- and **O**-motifs suggests that, even limiting considerations to what is ‘in’ particular paintings, the referential possibilities (i.e., meanings) are, potentially, endless. In general, then, whether one appeals to resemblances of form or meaning, the determination of precise references would appear to be precluded. On this basis, it would seem that the positing of resemblance is, in and of itself, insufficient to absolutely or definitively determine grounds for *Victory over Death 2, Painting from “Malady”*, and related works in the form of particular other paintings and/or other artists. Equivalently, one might say that the transindividual and other dimension of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making resists absolute determination. Still further, this also is to affirm that appealing to a resemblance (i.e., a relation of similarity and/or difference in form and/or meaning) is neither necessary nor sufficient for making a reference. Indeed, by way of anticipating discussion in following chapters, it is apparent that, ultimately, making a reference depends on *nothing* more than what Žižek terms the ‘radical contingency of naming’.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 97.

1.3 Sourcing the script of subjectivity

1.3.1 Painted texts

Let us test these propositions a little further. It may be noted that one of the most striking features of *Victory over Death 2, Painting from "Malady"*, and related works is that they exhibit painted *text*. Unlike 'purely' plastic symbols that, by virtue of being abstract or non-objective, might mean 'anything' and 'everything', the meaning of graphic symbols (i.e., the letters, numbers, words, phrases, punctuation, etc. that constitute *writing*) seems relatively constrained – even if this 'constraint' is, ultimately, nothing more than a 'radical contingency' enshrined in convention. In consequence, one may be encouraged to entertain the possibility that the works under consideration contain symbols whose meaning is not entirely indeterminate – on which basis, one might interpret these symbols as references to particular, grounding other artworks and/or other art subjects (i.e., as references to 'source texts' in which, in principle, there may be inscribed 'originating' 'voices' or 'subject positions'). To be clear on this point, this study takes the position that, in the final analysis, no such determinations are possible: in relation to graphic symbols (or, indeed, any meaning/form), the semblance of meaning constraint is, ultimately, illusory (or, in the jargon of Lacanian psychoanalysis, *imaginary*). To put the matter in equivalent terms: the determination of the 'ground' of meaning is an impossible ideal. Hence, neither symbols nor material particulars secure or capture meaning absolutely. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this discussion, it will be illuminating to engage with the painted script, in the works in question, in order to demonstrate that any attempt to determine grounds for the subjectivity they express is destined to miscarry.

At first glance, it seems trivial to determine the textual sources (and, hence, the particular, other, originating expressions of subjectivity) to which McCahon and Hotere, respectively, make recourse in the creation of *Victory over Death 2, Painting from "Malady"*, and their siblings. As Gordon Brown observes, McCahon's word paintings of 1969 and 1970 incorporate text from three primary sources: *The New English Bible*

(1961), Matire Kereama's *The Tail of the Fish: Maori memories of the Far North* (1968), and Peter Hooper's *Journey Towards an Elegy & Other Poems* (1969).¹⁵⁴ With regard to *Painting from "Malady"* and related works, matters appear even more straightforward. Thus, in O'Brien's *Landfall* article 'Some Paintings I Am Frequently Asked About', Manhire asserts authorship of the 'concrete/pattern poem' *Malady*, whose 'three articulations: *malady...melody...my lady*' feature in the stencilled text of the *Malady* paintings, and recalls that *Malady* (1970) was 'published in a limited edition to coincide with the exhibition opening' of the *Malady* series paintings.¹⁵⁵

Notwithstanding the apparent ease with which these texts are identifiable, in seeking to resolve or determine particular, other subjects who are originally inscribed in these sources subsequent to being 'translated' into the paintings under consideration, matters are, nevertheless, complicated by the following, three factors. Firstly, some paintings incorporate text from multiple sources and/or in multiple languages (i.e., the subjectivity that finds expression in these works is, at the outset, a collective or assemblage of others). Secondly, *particular* sources express multiple subject positions (i.e., several characters 'speak' within the space of a single, cited text). In either event, it is apparent that these multiple subject positions are *enlivened* and *sustained* by the *formal and/or pictorial disposition* of the painted texts in question. That is to say, by virtue of textual fragmentations, embellishments, elisions, repetitions, spatial composition, style of execution (e.g., freehand versus stencilled lettering, variations in font type, case, size, colour), and so forth. Thirdly, the texts cited are, themselves, merely instances in a field of textual reproductions, translations and revisions, the limits of which resist precise determination. Let us address each of these considerations in turn.

¹⁵⁴ Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist* (Auckland: Reed, 1993, originally published Wellington: Reed, 1984), 145-46, 157-8. See also *ibid*, 'Colin McCahon. Can you hear me St Francis, 1969' in *Towards a promised land: on the life and art of Colin McCahon* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2010, originally published as an entry in Peter Webb Galleries auction catalogue, n238, June 2001, lot 59), 161.

¹⁵⁵ Manhire quoted in O'Brien, 'Some Paintings I Am Frequently Asked About', 22-23. The exhibition to which Manhire refers is, evidently, *Black Paintings 1970 – Malady Series*, held at Dawsons Ltd Exhibition Gallery, Dunedin, July 1970. A more detailed summation of the *Malady* series paintings is given in chapter four.

1.3.2 Many texts in one painting

With regard to *Victory over Death 2 et al*, a good illustration of the first point is afforded by those works combining Māori language text from *The Tail of the Fish* with English language text drawn from the *New English Bible* and/or *Journey Towards an Elegy*. For example, in *If a man walks after nightfall* (001525, April 1969, ref. 44), the upper part of the picture space is dominated by a four line declamation from John (11: 9-10): ‘If a man walks after nightfall he stumbles because the light fails him’.¹⁵⁶ That is to say, misfortune befalls those who turn away from the light of heaven or who disobey the divine Law. The citation from Kereama takes the form of a single line of diminutive, capitalised lettering running along the lower left edge of the work: ‘E KORE E MAU I A KOE, HE WAEKAI PAKIAKA’, which is translated as: ‘A foot accustomed to running over roots makes the speediest runner.’¹⁵⁷ Here, in contrast to the quote from John, the proverb in Māori language implies that it is precisely through a willingness to continually transgress (i.e., test one’s limits, take risks) that one best learns the rules.

Also noteworthy is *The Lark’s Song (a poem by Matire Kereama)* (001360, August – October 1969, ref. 45, fig. 6). In this work, most of the painted script derives from Kereama’s account of the words traditionally associated with ‘lark singing’ – a game she recalls from her childhood in the early twentieth century, Māori community of Hauturu. The greater part of the picture space (comprised of two hinged, wooden doors) presents, in painted, cursive script, a double round of the *waiata* from Kereama’s book.¹⁵⁸ However, right of centre, along the bottom edge of the work, McCahon inscribes in block capitals ‘CAN YOU HEAR ME ST. FRANCIS’ – a phrase that, as Brown observes,

¹⁵⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical references in McCahon’s word paintings of 1969 and 1970 are taken from Joint Committee on the New Translation of the Bible, *The New English Bible, New Testament* (London: Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1961).

¹⁵⁷ Matire Kereama (Matire Hoeft), *The Tail of the Fish: Maori memories of the Far North* (Auckland: Oswald-Sealy, 1968), 14.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 60-61.

heads the ninth poem, in the 'Notes in the Margin' sequence, in Hooper's poetry anthology.¹⁵⁹ According to the well known story recounted in chapter XVI of *Fioretti di San Francesco (Little Flowers of St Francis)* (c.1390), the sonorous preaching of St Francis of Assisi compelled the close attentiveness of even the birds.¹⁶⁰ However, in McCahon's painting, the 'direction' of speech is reversed so that St Francis becomes the object, as it were, of the *lark's* entreaty or demand.

In both *If a man* and *The Lark's Song*, it is evident that the separation of opposing 'voices' is sustained by virtue of contrasts in language (English vs Māori), calligraphy (lowercase or cursive script vs uppercase, block capitals), and by the spatial disposition of these voices. Thus, in *If a man*, the text from John, writ large, is implicitly undermined by the diminutive, marginal riposte from Kereama; in *The Lark's Song* the line from Hooper's book functions to emphasise the declamatory status of the twinned *waiata* preceding it. Further to this idea of 'marginal' asides and emphases, it is evident that, in common with many of McCahon's paintings, *The Lark's Song* exhibits several peripheral inscriptions comprising, in this case, a dedication to Kereama, the painting title, and an artist signature combined with a date. These textual elements are distinguished from the 'main text' of the painting by virtue of being enclosed within light-toned, geometric shapes and/or being executed in a more diminutive script that reverses the light-on-dark relationship of the calligraphy citing Kereama and Hooper. It would, appear therefore, that these inscriptions are not integral with the painting's major text but rather extraneous elements that serve to frame and qualify this text. In this capacity, they offer to 'speak' in a voice that is, ostensibly, McCahon's 'own'. Even in this case, however, ambiguities arise. For example, in *The Lark's Song*, in a fashion echoing the repetition of the *waiata* from Kereama's book, there is, along the bottom edge of the work, a *double* inscription of

¹⁵⁹ Brown, 'Colin McCahon. Can you hear me St Francis', 162. For a reference to Hooper's poem see Peter Hooper, *Journey Towards an Elegy & Other Poems* (Christchurch: The Nag's Head Press, 1969), 57.

¹⁶⁰ Roger Hudleston (trans), *The little flowers of Saint Francis of Assisi* (New York: Limited Editions Club, 1930), 'Chapter XVI', 41-44 (see especially, 43).

McCahon's signature and a date.¹⁶¹ One gets the impression that McCahon's autobiographical gesture is, in effect, a *speaking of two minds* or a speaking that evinces a *change of mind* in response to the irruption of *second thoughts*.

What of *Victory over Death 2*? Whilst this painting seemingly 'speaks' a single language mostly drawn from a solitary source (i.e., *The New English Bible*: John 12: 27-30, 35-36 and 14: 4, 6), other 'loci' of speech are, nevertheless, evident. The most extensive textual assemblage does indeed comprise those verses from John 12 that make up the main body of the painted script in the work. However, at least two other categories may be defined. The most immediately striking of these comprises the monumental capitals forming the phrase 'AM I AM' – the precise provenance of which is, in fact, ambiguous (and which will, therefore, merit further discussion below). In a manner echoing the disposition of texts in *The Lark's Song*, the latter group comprises a trio of marginal inscriptions running along the bottom edge of the painting, wherein one finds

¹⁶¹ In *The Lark's Song*, the dedication to Kereama is located in a narrow, sky-blue rectangle located along the upper edge of the painting, about one third the way from the left extremity of the work. In diminutive capitals, McCahon writes:

FOR MATIRE KEREAMA... POET.

The title of the work is located in a light-toned, horizontal lozenge occupying the lower left corner of the painting. Here, in flowing, lowercase calligraphy, McCahon writes:

The lark's song.

Along the lower edge of the painting, there are two sets of artist signatures and dates. The first of these is located immediately to the right of the titular inscription. McCahon writes:

Colin McCahon August – October – '69.

The second signature and date is located in a horizontal, grey oblong occupying the lower right corner of the painting. Here, McCahon writes (somewhat less legibly):

Colin McCahon
Aug Oct '69

the title of the work, the location of the artist's studio, an artist's signature and date, and phrases from John 14.¹⁶²

Whilst *Painting from "Malady"* and related works exclusively employ English language text, this is not to suggest that Hotere's paintings only ever 'speak' a single language. For example, Māori and English language text features in many of the *Te Whiti* works and, specifically, in one painting that appears to combine the formal and thematic concerns of the *Te Whiti* and *Port Chalmers* series: *Darkness Settles Down* (1972, ref. 46, fig. 7). Thus, as O'Brien points out, 'Virtually all the "Te Whiti" works incorporate English translations alongside the original Māori. These are paintings to be read, listened to and understood by both Māori and Pākehā.' O'Brien observes, further, that 'In the manner of a bibliographer, Hotere goes so far as to detail, at the foot of each work, book references and page numbers of his sources.'¹⁶³ Here, however, even a brief inspection of *Te Whiti* works in reproduction reveals that adherence to this protocol is not, in fact, universal. Consider, for example, *Me Tangi Ko Te Mate I Te Marama* (1972, ref. 47),

¹⁶² The title of *Victory over Death 2*, inscribed in small uppercase script along the extreme, lower left edge of the work, echoes the capitalised subheading, employed in the 1961 edition of *The New English Bible*, to that section of the scriptures containing the final few verses of John 10, and encompassing the entirety of John 11 and John 12:

VICTORY OVER DEATH. 2.

The second marginal element comprises a two-line block of similarly-scaled uppercase text disposed beneath the legs of the brightly painted 'A' in the right half of the painting. In this inscription, McCahon modifies Christ's proclamation, in John 14: 6, transforming it into a sub-titular preliminary to autobiographical details such as the location in which the work was created, the date of its completion and the artist's signature:

THE WAY THE TRUTH & LIFE.
MURIWAI. FEB. '70 McCAHON.

The third marginal element, positioned between the legs of the off-white 'M' along the lower-right boundary of the canvas, modifies John 14: 4, where Christ reassures his followers with the statement: ' "and my way there is known to you" '; McCahon writes:

'My way is known to you.'

¹⁶³ O'Brien, 'Ploughing Ralph Hotere's Te Whiti Series' in Te Miringa Hohaia, Gregory O'Brien and Lara Strongman (eds), *Parihaka, The Art of Passive Resistance*, exh. cat. (Wellington: City Gallery, Wellington and Victoria University Press, 2001), 151.

where the prominent incorporation of an annular form resonates visually with several *Malady* series paintings. In this ink and acrylic work on paper, ‘ME TANGI’ is prominently inscribed in the space above the annulus and just below the upper boundary of the work. Below the circle-form, in a band of violet-toned wash running along the lower boundary of the painting, are three lines of text that include the following inscriptions:

ME TANGI
KAPA KO TE MATE I TE MARAMA
We weep tonight for the death of the moon (whakatauki)

The term *whakatauki* simply refers to those ‘proverbs’ or ‘sayings’ that are proper to the oral domain of expressions of Māori culture. Thus, where, precisely, Hotere encountered this saying is unclear. Indeed, any absolute determination of its ‘source’ would seem to be problematic, if not, impossible.¹⁶⁴

It may be instructive to compare Hotere’s employment of this proverb with McCahon’s incorporation of it in his four panel painting *O let us weep* (001590, April 1969, ref. 48) – the ostensible source of which is *The Tail of the Fish*.¹⁶⁵ In Hotere’s *Me Tangi*, the Māori language text is rendered in upper case – conveying, thereby, a sense of the formal and the impersonal in expressions of authority, objectivity, truth and law. By contrast, the English translation, relegated to the lower edge of the work, is presented in a diminutive, lower case script, that is more obviously a ‘handwritten’, personal, informal aside. Considered in their entirety, it does not appear that the *Te Whiti* paintings

¹⁶⁴ For a reference to the written provenance of this *whakatauki* see, for example, Hirini Moko Mead and Neil Grove, *Ngā Pēpeha a ngā Tīpuna, The Sayings of the Ancestors* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2001), 302. Here, acknowledgement is made of the listing in George Grey, *Ko nga whakapepeha me nga whakaahuareka a nga tipuna o Aotea-roa, Proverbial and popular sayings of the New Zealand race* (Cape Town: Trübner and Co, 1857), 70.

¹⁶⁵ Thus, in Kereama, 50, the *whakatauki* in question is presented like so:

Me tangi kapa ko te mate e te marama.
(Let us weep, for his is not the death of the
moon)
–A proverb emphasising the finality of death.

specifically privilege either language. Indeed, some works are almost entirely presented in English (e.g., *Hone Tuwhare's 'Not by Wind Ravaged'* (1972, ref. 49) or *Te Whiti: From John Caselberg's 'The Voice of the Maori'* (1972, ref. 50). However, it does appear to be the case that, when both Māori and English are employed, Hotere preserves their distinctiveness by virtue of differences in font size, font style, and disposition in the picture space. In *Me Tangi*, the sense of differentiation is further enforced by the disposition of textual elements *outside* the perimeter of the annulus – a symbol that signifies an ideal of unity or a void in which difference is annihilated.

Compared with Hotere's *Me Tangi*, McCahon's *O let us weep* sustains an approximate equivalence between Māori and English text insofar as words in both languages are rendered in the same cursive calligraphy. However, the phrase from Kereama's book appears only on the second panel (although its English translation is presented on both subsequent panels). In McCahon's painting, then, the English language takes precedence – even if the first and final words (the latter in translation) are Māori. Moreover, in contrast with *Me Tangi*, which sustains a certain difference between Māori and English expressions, in *O let us weep*, one encounters a contrapuntal play of voices that proceeds towards an ambiguous rapprochement. Thus, the first panel contains no text apart from small-scale inscriptions, along the top and bottom edges, detailing title, date and artist signature. Analogous inscriptions are present on the three companion panels. The next two panels incorporate the phrase from Kereama's book – first in Māori, then in English. In the fourth panel, McCahon *combines* text from John (11: 25-27) with *The Tail of the Fish*, to produce a continuous stanza that is, quite literally, at odds with itself:

and he said: I am the
 resurrection and I am
 life if a man has faith
 in me, even though he die
 he shall come to life,
 and no one who is alive
 and has faith shall ever
 die. Do you believe
 this? O let us weep. Ours
 is not the death of the

moon

In St John's gospel, Christ's challenge to Martha (the sister of Lazarus): 'Do you believe this?' is followed by her affirmation of her faith in Christ as 'the Messiah, the Son of God' (John 11: 27). However, as noted in *The Tail of the Fish*, 'Let us weep, for his is not the death of the moon', is a 'proverb emphasising the finality of death'. That is to say, the death of the moon is always followed by a rebirth – unlike the end of an individual human life. In McCahon's painting, then, the text from John, inviting the spectator to momentarily entertain the possibility of an afterlife, is immediately countermanded by Kereama's lament.

This said, it might be hasty to read the line from Kereama as *O let us weep*'s 'final word'. For, whilst 'Ours is not the death of the moon' appears to be an unambiguous statement of finality, the *repetition* of this phrase invests it with an insistent rhythm and sense of continuity akin to those very cycles of nature (the phases of the moon) to which it is, seemingly, opposed. The *repetition* of the words 'Ours is not the death of the moon' is a device that potentially contradicts the ostensive content of the statement (thereby attesting to a split or multiple subjectivity). Hence, it is tempting to read, in *O let us weep*, a subtext whereby the *formal* expression of a mournful reflection on human mortality invites interpretation as an expression of hope or longing for the continuation of life after death. It should be noted that the trope of repetition also is evident in Hotere's *Me Tangi* – in the incorporation of the circle or annulus, in the doubling of the phrase 'ME TANGI', and in the standardisation and stylisation of the Māori language script.¹⁶⁶

As noted earlier, another noteworthy example of Hotere's use of text in Māori and English is *Darkness Settles Down* – a work that O'Brien characterises as a 'hybrid of Hotere's abstract "Port Chalmers" series and the "Te Whiti" series'.¹⁶⁷ Here, as indicated

¹⁶⁶ As noted in O'Brien, 'Ploughing Ralph Hotere's Te Whiti Series', 152, the 'hollow lettering' indicates where Hotere intended to use stencils in a series of more elaborate *Te Whiti* paintings on canvas that, in the event, did not materialise.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 152.

in a diminutive line of capitalised lettering at the bottom right-of-centre of the painting, Hotere draws on a chant reproduced in John White, *The Ancient History of the Maori* (1887).¹⁶⁸ It is significant that, in common with the aforementioned *Me Tangi*, Hotere's painting employs a range of formal devices (font size, font style, tonality of inscribed

¹⁶⁸ For a reference to the text employed in *Darkness Settles Down* see John White, *The Ancient History of the Maori, His Mythology and Traditions, Horo-Uta or Taki-Tumu Migration*, v2 (New Zealand Electronic Text Collection Te Pūhikotuhi o Aotearoa: Victoria University, 2007, originally published Wellington: George Didsbury, 1887), <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-corpus-WhiAnci.html>, (16.07.13)), 102 (Māori version), 108 (English version). In Hotere's painting, the text is disposed as follows. Equidistantly disposed around the circumference of a crossed, magenta-toned, double-annulus (so that, in fact, the four text blocks define the corners of an implied square within which the double annulus is enclosed), Hotere inscribes the following lines in stencilled, coloured (red, grey, magenta), capitalised text:

TENA TE PO KA WHIWHI

TENA TE PO KA TATAU

TENA
TE PO
HIRA
ATU NA

AUA TE NGARO

HE NGARO TAKI TAWHITO

At bottom-right of centre, in smaller, white-toned, free-hand capitals, Hotere inscribes the translation:

DARKNESS SETTLES DOWN
AND NEARER DRAWS AND DEEPENS
YES, DARKNESS NOW ENVELOPS ALL
AND HIDES FROM SIGHT, AND ANCIENT
GODS AND PRIESTS ARE HID

Below this, in a single line of even more diminutive capital lettering, Hotere writes

FROM 'THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF THE MAORI' JOHN SMITH VOL II P.102
(MAORI) P.108 (ENGLISH)

At the extreme lower right, Hotere inscribes a signature and a date:

Hotere
Port Chalmers
71 -72.

text, use of stencils versus handwriting, spatial positioning of script) in order to accentuate the *differences* between text in Māori language and that in English. Thus, the script in Māori is toned or *coloured* whilst that in English is *white*. The script in Māori speaks, as it were, from all four points of the compass (omni-presently, universally), whilst that in English is confined to a small area at the lower right of centre. The Māori text is rendered in stencils and disposed on parallel lines – thus evincing a degree of order, balance, regularity, and (relative) stylistic invariance. This is in keeping with the sense that it represents the voice of an eternal authority or the air of a solemn ritual. By contrast, the English script, whilst neat and legible, has the appearance of a swiftly written, free-hand note. Indeed, the slight, rightwards tilt imparted to the letters and the disposition of words on lines that are not parallel accentuates the sense that, within a Māori space or territory of meaning, the English script functions as a transient interloper or afterthought.

1.3.3 Many subjects in one text

The second consideration noted earlier (i.e., that the *same* textual source enlivens *multiple* subject positions) is illustrated well by the likes of *Practical Religion* – a work that extensively cites St John’s gospel as given in *The New English Bible* (John 10: 40 – 11: 44). Reading its painted calligraphy from left to right, the first subject position one encounters is that of John, himself, as narrator. Thus, the upper left of *Practical Religion* brandishes John’s opening declamation: ‘JESUS WITHDREW AGAIN ACROSS THE JORDAN...’ (John 10: 40). Speaking about his own baptismal activities in the third person (i.e., a subject position other than or apart from himself), John refers to the anonymous ‘crowds’ who flocked to Christ and attributes to them the following, general sentiment that, in McCahon’s painting, is reproduced with a stuttering repetition: ‘ “JOHN – JOHN GAVE US NO MIRACULOUS SIGN, BUT ALL HE SAID ABOUT THIS MAN WAS TRUE” ’ (John 10: 41-42). As with the doubled inscriptions in *The Lark’s Song*, the reiteration of John’s name generates a sense of equivocation or second-guessing. John’s testimony next refers to the illness of Christ’s friend Lazarus, and the supplication sent to Christ by Lazarus’ sisters, Mary and Martha. In McCahon’s painting,

the relevant passage is, again, reproduced with a stutter – this time, in the form of a spelling mistake: ‘ “SIR, YOU SHOUD [sic] KNOW THAT YOUR FRIEND LIES ILL” ’ (John 11: 4). Christ’s initial response is reproduced in *Practical Religion* as ‘ “THIS SICKNESS WILL NOT END IN DEATH, IT HAS COME FOR THE GLORY OF GOD” ’ (John 11: 4). Moreover, in the space to the left of the prominent, green trapezoid depicting ‘Mount Martha’, McCahon presents a double rendition of Christ’s resolution: ‘ “LET US GO BACK TO JUDEA” ’ (John 11: 7-8) – one iteration near the top part of the canvas, the other running along the lower boundary of the work. Here, the effect is to make Christ speak from two subject positions – almost as if to suggest that Christ is in two minds about his decision. John’s testimony then brings into play Christ’s disciples, who question the wisdom of their leader’s resolution to return to a place where he has, lately, been under threat of public stoning. McCahon renders their anxious enquiry in lower case italics as: ‘ “are you going there again?” ’ (John 11: 8-9). *Practical Religion*’s remaining calligraphy is, subsequently, dominated by the ‘voices’ of John as narrator, Christ, Mary, and Martha. The exception is an aside that McCahon inscribes in two lines of diminutive, bracketed, upper-case text inserted near the lower right of the painting. This presents the aggrieved response of some of Mary’s Jewish companions who cannot understand why Christ had allowed Lazarus to perish: ‘[COULD NOT THIS MAN WHO HAD OPENED THE BLIND MANS EYES HAVE DONE SOMETHING TO HAVE KEPT LAZARUS FROM DYING]’ (John 11: 37). Bracketed from the surrounding script, and further differentiated by virtue of font size and capitalisation, this text block effectively functions to qualify or undermine the primary narrative (i.e., as previously suggested, evinces a change of mind or second thoughts).

At first glance, *Victory over Death 2* seems to present less of a ‘cacophony’ than *Practical Religion* – nevertheless, on closer inspection, it is evident that, in the styling and disposition of its calligraphy, the later work similarly accentuates the degree to which John’s testimony is, to some degree, a speaking of others – namely, Christ, God and a group of onlookers. In terms of scriptural context, the text reproduced in *Victory over Death 2* finds Christ, en route to Jerusalem, following the miraculous Raising of Lazarus.

The opening statement is contained within the block of lower case script situated beneath the arch of the crepuscular 'M' in the left third of the painting, where Christ declaims:

'Now my soul
is in turmoil
and what have
I to say?
Father, save
me from this
hour.
No, it was for this
that I came to
this hour.' (John 12: 27-28)

Aware of his story's impending climax, Christ experiences a crisis of faith and appeals to the heavens for surcease. Almost immediately, however, Christ answers his own question, accepting the inevitability and necessity of his sacrifice (i.e., the doubting Christ performs what is, in effect, a double-take, and thereby negates his doubt). He then petitions God to validate his faith – a statement McCahon disposes in a line of text located above the 'M', along the top edge of the painting:

'Father, glorify your
name'.

Here, John, as third person narrator, intercedes with the comment that McCahon renders as follows:

a voice sounded from
heaven,

The next subject position to be introduced is that of the Judeo-Christian God, whose response to Christ's entreaty McCahon expresses in bold capitals immediately to the left of the central **I**-form (thus mirroring or anticipating the subjectivity expressed in the major text of the work, 'AM I AM'):

'I HAVE

GLORIFIED
IT, AND I WILL
GLORIFY IT
AGAIN.' (John 12: 28-29)

The narrator then details the reaction of the astounded onlookers, and Christ's reply – which, in *Victory over Death 2*, is located in the space between the central 'I' and the 'A' of the rightward 'AM' :

The crowd standing
by said it was
thunder, while
others said, 'An
angel has spoken
to him.' Jesus
replied, 'This
voice spoke for
your sake,
not mine.' (John 12: 29-30)

At this point, McCahon omits those lines of text where Christ alludes to his looming sacrifice, jumping ahead to the response Christ makes to the crowd's protestations (in John 12: 34) that he 'must be lifted up'. In a kind of retrogressive see-sawing that demonstrates to what degree McCahon both fragments and re-orders John's testimony in the space of his painting, this inscription is placed against the lower-left edge of the central **I**-motif:

'The light
is among you
still, but not
for long. Go
on your way
while you
have the light
so that darkness
may not over-
take you. He
who journeys
in the dark
does not know

where he is
going. (John 12: 35)

Approximately parallel to its initial instating, the phrase

the light
is among you

is reiterated in a spatial transposition to the right of the central 'I' and, beneath this repetition, is inscribed Christ's final admonishment:

While you have
the light, trust
to the light,
that you may
become men of
light.' (John 12: 36)

These tactics, whereby the text from John 12 is fragmented, repeated, and spatially dispersed, reinforce the impression that Christ speaks from multiple subject positions or evinces a 'split' subjectivity.

On initial inspection, it may not seem obvious how, in *Painting from "Malady" et al*, Hotere's deployment of Manhire's text enlivens *multiple* subject positions. After all, these paintings exhibit nothing more than stencilled, capitalised iterations of the English words MELODY and MALADY (and, in a few works, the phrase MY LADY). However, I would remind the reader that, in the paintings under consideration, multiple subject positions are not only enlivened by the incorporation of multiple scripts in multiple languages, or single scripts in which several 'characters' are given voice, but also by the *formal and pictorial disposition* of these scripts in the aforementioned works. In other words, in the *Malady* paintings, multiple subject positions are enlivened by the formal and pictorial translation of what is proper to Manhire's concrete poem. That is to say, the disposition of the typewritten words MELODY and MALADY, and the phrase MY LADY, in accordance with various compositional strategies that include (1) pages

entirely omitting text, (2) the isolation of single words on, otherwise, empty pages, (3) the repetition of words in vertical columns or in irregular arrays, (4) the juxtaposition of different textual elements on the same page (e.g., towards the end of Manhire's book, one finds a page in which a vertical column of MALADYs, at left, parallels a vertical column of MELODYs to its right), and (5) the juxtaposition of textual elements with more 'purely' pictorial elements (e.g., Hotere's vertical lines and bands, executed in ink and watercolour wash).

What this implies for the *Malady* series paintings (if not, in fact, for any painting utilising textual elements or more purely 'plastic' forms – which is to say, painting *in general*) is that, potentially, the subjectivity expressed admits infinite subdivision. Even limiting considerations only to textual features, this partitioning may operate on the level of word groups, solitary words, letters, or infinitesimal parts thereof – differences of this kind being sustained on the basis of criteria that are, similarly, limitless.¹⁶⁹ In any painting, then, the most elementary attribution of subjectivity inheres in the positing of a single subject position. In the case of *Painting from "Malady"*, this would involve attributing to a single subject the fifteen-fold reiteration of the word MELODY (i.e., the painting represents one 'voice' intoning 'MELODY' fifteen times). Potentially, however, it is possible to group the MELODYs (or any part thereof) in accordance with an infinity of other, possible, classificatory criteria, on which basis an infinity of other subject positions may be defined. For example, if one chooses 'spatial positioning' as such a criterion then it is possible to attribute different subject positions to the vertical column of four MELODYs near the upper right perimeter of the annulus, or the pair of MELODYs, one light, one dark, disposed bottom centre of the circle form, or the MELODYs located in the lower right quadrant of the annulus as opposed to those located in the upper left quadrant – or, indeed, any other combination of textual elements. If one chooses 'tonality' as a criterion then it is possible to attribute different subject positions to those

¹⁶⁹ To anticipate matters for further discussion in chapters two and four, the possibility of so subdividing the subjectivity expressed in *Painting from "Malady"* follows from what, in Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton & Co, 1956), 60, is characterised as the metonymical *combination* and *contexture* of signs. That is to say, always already, any sign (i.e., expression of subjectivity) may be understood as a combination of simpler 'linguistic units' and admits being combined with other signs to form more complex units.

MELODYs that are, relatively speaking, rendered in light-toned pigment as opposed to those executed in darker shades. One might even choose ‘degree of truncation by the bounding annulus’ as a criterion and, on this basis, attribute different subject positions to the group of five MELODYs that are so curtailed and the group of ten MELODYs that are inscribed in full.

In *Painting from “Malady”*, the seemingly random spatial distribution of the fifteen MELODYs, combined with variations in their execution, contributes to the ease with which multiple subject positions may be posited. Notwithstanding the presence of a powerfully unifying, annular enclosure, the subjectivity thus defined seems to encompass a multiplicity of different perspectives – which is, precisely, to say that it is a multiple subjectivity or a subjectivity divided. This tension between the singular and the multiple is also present in other *Malady* series works that are, perhaps, more compositionally regimented and austere – notably, *Black Painting XII from “Malady”* (1970, ref. 51, fig. 8) and *Black Painting XV from “Malady”* (1970, ref. 52, fig. 9). In these two paintings, it is not the annulus/disk that formally mediates or determines the placement of stencilled text, but rather, respectively, a cruciform/rectangular frame, and an X-shape. In both these paintings, the close confinement of textual elements within embracing geometric shapes, in combination with an execution that, relatively speaking, admits minimal variation in tone or density of pigment, encourages the attribution of a singular subject position. At the same time, however, the sheer number of stencilled words (over sixty in each painting) enlivens the possibility of any number of subdivisions and, hence, the positing of any number of subject positions. Indeed, it may be suggested that the subjectivity expressed in *Black Painting XII from “Malady”* and *Black Painting XV from “Malady”* defines a veritable ‘cross-talk’ – a subjectivity that is ‘at crossed purposes’ or at odds with itself. In the former work, this is particularly evident in the vertical and horizontal disposition of stencilled MALADYs, thereby defining a cruciform array. Moreover, the corners of the painting bear witness to less obvious ‘crossings’ wherein meet the vertically and horizontally oriented lines of MALADYs defining the boundary of the work. Finally, whilst not a ‘cross-talk’ *per se*, another obvious opposition obtains between the dark grey MALADY stencils disposed in the cruciform, and the blue-violet

MALADY stencils that constitute the rectangular frame. In the latter case, it should be noted that *Black Painting XV from “Malady”* defines a subcategory of the *Malady* paintings in which there is reiteration of MALADY and MELODY. Immediately, then, there is, at least, enlivened the possibility of a double subjectivity. Even more striking, however, is the manner by which, in the upper centre of the painting, opposing, diagonal axes of stencilled text intersect and intermingle. Here, the two-fold subjectivity accumulates a further quotient of ambiguity insofar MALADY and MELODY run together in a region of mutual superposition and annihilation. Out of the ensuing hubbub, there emerges a field of fragmentary voices stuttering on the edge of sense: ‘MALADY LODY’, ‘MALMELODY’, ‘MALADY DY’, ‘MMELODY’, ‘MMALADY’, ‘MELODY DY’, ‘MELMALADY’, ‘MELODY LADY’...

1.3.4 Texts in translation

In seeking to resolve or determine a *particular* subject who is ‘originally’ inscribed in a ‘source’ text, subsequent to being ‘translated’ into the paintings under consideration, the third consideration mentioned at the outset of the present section arises in view of the fact that, invariably, the texts cited are not, in fact, ‘originary’ but rather, instances in a field of textual reproductions, translations and revisions, the limits of which resist precise determination. Consider, for example, the provenance of the painted calligraphy employed in *The Lark’s Song* (and, hence, the possibility of relating the text to an originating subject). With regard to the Māori language text derived from *The Tail of the Fish*, Kereama acknowledges the traditional ‘origins’ of the words to *The Lark’s Song*: ‘All Maori children knew the song in those days and many of the elders remember some of the words even now.’¹⁷⁰ Indeed, it is apparent that the *waiata* or *karakia*, to which Kereama refers, is an almost ubiquitous expression of Toi Māori that exists in many different forms throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand.¹⁷¹ Moreover, references to this

¹⁷⁰ Kereama, 60.

¹⁷¹ For some references to variations on the *waiata* presented in Matire Kereama (Matire Hoeft), *The Tail of the Fish: Maori memories of the Far North* (Auckland: Oswald-Sealy, 1968), 61, see, for example, Elsdon Best, ‘The Diversions of the Whare Tapere: Some Account of the various

traditional chant tend to stress its resistance to translation. Indeed, in *The Tail of the Fish*, Kereama suggests that

In order to translate these words into English one must imagine the thoughts of children lying lazily on the river bank, looking up into the blue sky where the lark circles and flutters, while they sing the words they think the lark is saying.¹⁷²

The validity of Kereama's impressionistic 'translation' (and thus the status of *The Lark's Song* as an impasse to any straightforward or definitive transcription in English) is reified

Games, Amusements, and Trials of Skill practised by the Maori in Former Times' in *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand 1868-1961*, v34, 1901, 54-55, Hōne Apanui and Nuki Takao (trans), 'Ka Tahi Tī' in New Zealand Ministry of Education, Te Tāhuhu O Te Mātauranga, *Hei Waiata, Hei Whakakoakoa, Waiata to support teaching and learning of Te Reo Māori in English-medium schools: Years 1-8* (Wellington: Learning Media, 2008 (1992)), <http://www.google.co.nz/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=ka%20tahi%20ti&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=0CCkQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Ftereomaori.tki.org.nz%2Fcontent%2Fdownload%2F907%2F4852%2F&ei=KrDQUamUKo7VkQXZsYGgAg&usg=AFQjCNGjyPICvsWOMINGiB0KWmoJQ-ifJA&bvm=bv.48572450,d.dGI>, (01.07.13), 63, and Mervyn McLean & Margaret Orbell, *Songs Of A Kaumatua* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2002), 231. In accessing these sources, I gratefully acknowledge the guidance of Lynne-Harata Te Aika (Kāi Tahu, Ngāti Awa), University of Canterbury, Aotahi: School of Māori and Indigenous Studies.

It may be noted that a similar indeterminacy of textual origin attaches to the closing script in *The Lark's Song*: 'CAN YOU HEAR ME ST. FRANCIS.' In Hooper, 6, it is acknowledged that some of the poems were published previously in various periodicals and/or included in radio broadcasts.

¹⁷² Kereama, 61. See also 'Ka Tahi Tī' in New Zealand Ministry of Education, Te Tāhuhu O Te Mātauranga, *Hei Waiata, Hei Whakakoakoa, Waiata to support teaching and learning of Te Reo Māori in English-medium schools: Years 1-8*, trans Hōne Apanui and Nuki Takao (Wellington: Learning Media, 2008 (1992)), <http://www.google.co.nz/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=ka%20tahi%20ti&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=0CCkQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Ftereomaori.tki.org.nz%2Fcontent%2Fdownload%2F907%2F4852%2F&ei=KrDQUamUKo7VkQXZsYGgAg&usg=AFQjCNGjyPICvsWOMINGiB0KWmoJQ-ifJA&bvm=bv.48572450,d.dGI>, (01.07.13), 63, where it is suggested that 'This traditional chant isn't easily translated because it is symbolic and metaphorical', and McLean & Orbell, *Songs Of A Kaumatua*, 231, where it is stated that 'Although some expressions in this karakia can be recognised, its language is highly cryptic. Without further information, it cannot be translated.' This said, in Best, 54, it is noted that the *waiata* in question was, at once, a 'doggerel... repeated by children, the object being to see who could go through it in one breath' and a '*tatai whetu*' (i.e., recitation or counting of the names of stars or constellations) that was 'performed in former times in order to kill a frost... thus saving crops.' Best's interpretation is among the alternatives presented in Apanui and Takao, and in McLean and Orbell.

in Curnow's essay, 'McCahon and Signs'. Moreover, Curnow also observes that 'There is no reference to a lark in the text of McCahon's painting, nor, of course, in the song Matire Kereama's children sang.'¹⁷³ Indeed, on the basis of McCahon's recollection, in *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition*, that 'finally the little lark took off up the painting and out of sight', evidently, the lark (the ostensive subject 'speaking' in the work) is 'present' only in the form of the sign of its *passing*: i.e., the vertical line of finely inscribed dashes that 'ascend' through the horizontal midpoint of the work.¹⁷⁴

Similar difficulties arise in relation to those word paintings from 1969 and 1970 that cite St John's gospel as presented in *The New English Bible*. Even leaving aside the status of the bible as a veritable chorus of gospels, the precise authorship of which is not always certain, it may be noted that (as its very title suggests) *The New English Bible* is scarcely an original statement but rather the latest in a long series of translations (and, hence, re-writings, re-interpretations) of the scriptures.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, *The New English Bible*, itself, appeared in two editions – the *New Testament* was published in 1961 and a second edition of the *New Testament*, in conjunction with the *Old Testament* (including the *Apocrypha*), in 1970. Apparently, McCahon drew from both versions. That, in the word paintings of 1969 and 1970, McCahon utilises text from the 1961 edition of *The New English Bible* is corroborated in a letter from the artist to John Caselberg, dated 4 June (c.1969). Here, McCahon specifically mentions 'the New English Bible (Oxford-

¹⁷³ Curnow, 'McCahon and Signs', 54. In the name of accuracy, it may be noted that Kereama does not attribute 'Lark Singing' to *her children*, as Curnow's wording implies, but rather refers to it as a game in which she participated *as a child*. In McCahon discourse, the challenge to English translation that the Māori language text of *The Lark's Song* presents also is evident from its characterisation as 'cryptic' in O'Brien, 'Nouns and Verbs, a poetics of painting; Colin McCahon' in Taberner, *Colin McCahon, A Question of Faith, papers from a seminar*, 45.

¹⁷⁴ McCahon and O'Reilly, *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition*, 36.

¹⁷⁵ In the 'Introduction' to *The New English Bible, New Testament*, vii-x, the lineage of the text is acknowledged. Its immediate predecessors are identified as the so-called *Authorised Version of the King James Bible* (1611) and its *Revised Version* (1881). Moreover, also acknowledged are the challenges involved in creating a translation in English from archaic Greek – a process that, inevitably, results in what is an interpretation, as opposed to an exact counterpart, of the source text.

Cambridge 1961)'.¹⁷⁶ At the same time, however, Brown suggests that certain of McCahon's late word paintings, employing *Old Testament* text from Ecclesiastes cite the 1970 edition of *The New English Bible*.¹⁷⁷

The major script of *Victory over Death 2* further exemplifies the difficulty in determining an originary text as a preliminary to determining an originary subjectivity. I have already noted how *Victory over Death 2*'s 'AM I AM' resonates with the 'I AM; that is who I am' of the *Old Testament* God speaking to Moses in Exodus and the wording of the Cartesian *cogito*. To these possible sources, one also might add John 14: 6: '*I am* the way; *I am* truth and *I am* life' (my italics). Indeed, to the extent that *Victory over Death 2*'s 'I AM' distils the triplicate in-stating of John 14: 6 into the form of a single utterance, it echoes other abbreviations McCahon promulgates in his painted script. These include, for example, the contraction of John's phrase to 'THE WAY THE TRUTH & LIFE.' (which, itself, involves the substitution of the ampersand '&' for 'and'), the condensation of the date to 'FEB. '70', and the truncation of the artist's signature to McCahon's surname.

In light of these ambiguities, it is striking how several prominent McCahon scholars have seized upon Exodus 3 as the 'source' of this painted text – even though, in every case, the attribution is unsubstantiated. Indeed, it is the position of this study that no definitive corroboration ever could be forthcoming. If it is tenable to conceive of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making in terms of the tension obtaining between the individual and a transindividual otherness then the positing of Exodus 3 as a textual 'source' cannot be secured by appealing to the assertions of any particular individual – whether the art subject called 'McCahon' or otherwise. In view of this state of affairs, the repeated positing of Exodus 3 as a textual source for the major script of *Victory over Death 2* exemplifies what was previously suggested in section 1.2: in the final analysis,

¹⁷⁶ McCahon in a letter to John Caselberg dated 4 June 1969), cited in Simpson, *Answering hark*, 99.

¹⁷⁷ Brown, ' "The Speaker", The Painter, The Discursive Dialoguer' in McCahon, Pound, and Brown, *Colin McCahon, The Last Painting* (Auckland: Peter Webb Galleries Ltd., 1993), 13.

reference depends on *nothing* more than a ‘radical contingency of naming’. Moreover, it is also significant that, even in locating the ‘origin’ of this statement in Exodus 3, many of these same writers acknowledge that, in the context of McCahon’s painting, the nature of the subjectivity thus enlivened is multiple or ambiguous. For example, in the untitled essay, in the catalogue to the exhibition *I will need words: Colin McCahon’s word and number paintings*, Curnow asserts, of the ‘AM I AM’, that ‘The text is from Exodus...’ and yet also concedes, on the basis of the qualifying, crepuscular ‘AM’ at the left of the work, that there is some doubt as to who, precisely, is speaking: ‘The painting is at once God’s assertion of his being, Jesus’s of his, and (inescapably) McCahon’s assertion of his.’¹⁷⁸ In a contemporaneous, critical review of Curnow’s essay, Green reiterates this point:

The shadowy **AM** that, half-seen, precedes the white **I AM** is taken as signifying doubt, as contrasted with the assertion of being (visibility=presence) of the light-painted inscription. But whose doubt is the question. It is not simply a matter of equating every statement with the text inscription with a statement of the of the personal I of the artist.

Nevertheless, Green allows that ‘The text drawn on is likely as not the I AM THAT I AM of Exodus III’ and then proposes that the doubting subject implied might well be Moses who, as Green points out, ‘continually asks “Who am I?” as in III, 11: “Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh...?”’¹⁷⁹ In *Colin McCahon: artist* (1993, 1984), Brown also relates the ‘AM I AM’ to Exodus, whilst acknowledging its consonance with the phrase ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega’ in the Book of Revelations (1: 8, 21: 6, 22: 13).¹⁸⁰ As a final example, Pound, in the concluding paragraph of ‘McCahon, Skies, Stars, Writing’ (1990), acknowledges that ‘The word “I” is one of those words referred to by linguists as a “shifter” – a vagabond word, one with no fixed address, which shifts constantly from

¹⁷⁸ Curnow, untitled essay included in McCahon, *I will need words*. As observed in Green, ‘Review: I Will Need Words’ in *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History*, v9, 1985, 65, Curnow’s essay contains a misprint: it refers to Exodus (3: 4) instead of (3: 14).

¹⁷⁹ Green, ‘Review: I Will Need Words’, 62.

¹⁸⁰ Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist* (1993), 148-49, n17, 229.

one speaker to another.’ On this basis, Pound asserts that, in *Victory over Death 2*, this ‘I’ is

...inextricably and indeterminately – the ‘I’ of the biblical God’s ‘I am that I am’... the ‘I’ of painting in general, and the ‘I’ of this particular painting, and the ‘I’ of the painter himself.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Pound, ‘McCahon, Skies, Stars, Writing,’ 164. See, also, *ibid*, ‘Colin McCahon and the language of Practical Religion’, 13, where Pound asserts, of *Victory over Death 2* and *Gate III*, that

McCahon’s ‘I AM’ is certainly the ‘I AM THAT I AM’ of the biblical God; it is also the I AM’ which announces the artist’s presence.

In the context of a study exploring subjectivity from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Pound’s linguistic allusion to ‘I’ as a ‘shifter’ is worthy of further elucidation. In referring to the first person pronoun as a shifter, Pound correctly acknowledges the ambiguous status of the subjectivity thus enlivened. However, from a Lacanian standpoint, it is also necessary to understand that this subjectivity is neither simply nor wholly conceivable in metaphysical terms. The subjectivity saying ‘I’ is ambiguous not because it is *multiple* but rather insofar as ‘it’ exceeds the metaphysical framework within which ‘individual’ subjects are posited as such.

In relation to Lacanian theory, the key reference, in this regard, is Jakobson, ‘Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb’ in *Selected Writings, Volume II, Word and Language* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1971, originally prepared for the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature project ‘Description and Analysis of Contemporary Standard Russian’ (Harvard University, 1957)), 130-47. Here, Jakobson introduces a distinction between *message* and *code* by way of reframing the distinction between *speech* and *language* (or, in the French, *parole* and *langue*) made in Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Reidlinger, trans, with an introduction and notes by Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966, originally published as *Cours de linguistique générale*, Paris: Payot, 1916), 13-14. Crucially, Jakobson proposes that the *message* (that which is encoded by addressers and decoded by addressees) and the *code* (the medium of language or collection of signifiers by virtue of which this coding is enabled) are not irrevocably separate but rather overlap (130). In Jakobson’s view, the first person pronoun exemplifies such an undermining or dissolving of distinctions between speech acts and language codes. After Otto Jespersen, *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1922), 123, Jakobson characterises ‘I’ as a *shifter* insofar as its ‘general meaning’ (i.e., coding in the transindividual, symbolic structure) ‘cannot be defined without a reference to the message’ (i.e., the particular subject uttering ‘I’). Moreover, Jakobson classifies the first person pronoun as an *indexical symbol* insofar as ‘I’ combines the function of an *index* (i.e., ‘I’ is a sign that points to or indicates a *particular*, existing, speaking subject and thus defines a relation of *presence*) and a *symbol* (i.e., ‘I’ is a sign that, *in general*, always represents ‘the subject uttering “I” ’ and thus defines a relation of *absence*) (131-32). Jakobson’s formulation implies that the subjectivity saying ‘I’ is a *speaking* (message-sending) that is, at the same time, a *being-spoken* (encoding). Hence, the subjectivity saying ‘I’ cannot be wholly or simply identical to the ego as an ideal of self-unity, self-presence and self-empowerment. On the contrary, the subjectivity saying ‘I’

As far as the *Malady* series paintings are concerned, the determination of a source text in which, in principle, there may be inscribed an original and singular subject position evinces various complications. In the first place, Manhire's 'concrete/pattern poem' exists in at least three, distinct iterations, each of which is significantly different from its siblings. These differences complicate the endeavour to determine a source text in which there may be inscribed a singular, originating subject position. For, notwithstanding the chronological order of their production, it is unclear which version of *Malady* is to be considered 'complete', 'final', or 'definitive'. Indeed, the question arises as to whether each distinct iteration of the *Malady* book deserves to be considered a separate artwork or even, in fact, whether the 'concrete/pattern poem' *Malady* (and thence the subjectivity of which it is a sign) is simply or immediately synonymous with any material instantiation. Thus, according to Manhire's recollection, the initial printed iteration of *Malady* took the form of a hand-assembled, 'typewritten booklet – pages of word patterns.' Manhire continues: 'I must have given a copy of the *Malady* book to Ralph at some stage. He presumably flicked through it and started making the paintings which became the *Malady*

would appear to be precisely that in relation to which are undermined absolute metaphysical distinctions between inside and outside, presence and absence, agent and automaton.

To anticipate matters for discussion in chapter two, Lacan, in effect, carries out a psychoanalytic transformation of Jakobson's linguistics through a consideration of message and code in light of the unconscious. On this basis, the message signifies that which is 'truly' or 'really' speaking – i.e., an unconscious subjectivity or what Lacan terms the 'subject of the unconscious'. The code signifies that in relation to which speech is given – i.e., that which may be termed, variously, the constellation of signifiers with their accompanying rules of syntax and grammar, the symbolic order, or the system of language as the Other's discourse. In this regard, it is important to understand that, from a Lacanian perspective, neither the subject of the unconscious nor the system of language admit determination in metaphysical terms – i.e., as 'contained within', 'emanating from' or, otherwise, signifying beings-present and/or essences of selfhood.

For an example of where Lacan specifically refers to Jakobson's essay in relation to the message/code distinction, see Lacan, 'On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis' in *Écrits* (2006) (originally written as 'D'une question préliminaire à tout traitement possible de la psychose', December 1957 – January 1958, and originally published in *La Psychanalyse*, v4 (1959), 1-50, 450, 485 (n1). For further accounts of Lacan's employment of Jakobson's message/code distinction see Grigg, *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 12, 172 (n15), Chiesa, 41-43, Evans, 182, and Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 37-38, 183 (n3).

series.’¹⁸² As noted previously, *Malady* (1970) was published, subsequently, in an edition of 150 copies, to coincide with the exhibition *Black Paintings 1970-Malady Series*. A second edition of *Malady* (1997), in a print run of 500 copies, was published to coincide with Hotere’s major touring exhibition *Hotere – out the black window* (1997).¹⁸³

On Manhire’s account, the first, hand-assembled version of *Malady* evidently contains only pages of patterned text (i.e., as Manhire puts it, the ‘three articulations... malady...melody...my lady’). By contrast, *Malady* (1970) and *Malady* (1997) comprise pages of patterned typescript interleaved with (mostly) monochrome reproductions of ink and watercolour wash drawings. Whilst both published texts preserve a strict separation of textual and pictorial elements (i.e., at no point are print and pictorial features presented on the *same* page, although it is frequently the case that the two features are disposed on *opposing* pages), they are, nevertheless, different in several important respects. In the first place, the only pictorial element the latter two versions have in common is the very first ink and wash drawing opposing a solitary ‘malady’ centred on the left margin of the facing page. Moreover, in the 1970 edition of *Malady*, the repetition of ‘MALADY’ and ‘MELODY’ in two vertical columns on a single page is followed by a page that is empty. However, in the 1997 version, this empty page is replaced by a single, colour reproduction of an ink and wash drawing. There is also a slight variance in the disposition of *Malady*’s textual *dénouement*: ‘my lady’. In the 1997 edition, this is shifted forward a page so that it is no longer located on the back of a leaf (as in the 1970 edition – where it opposes the page featuring a final illustration and book design credit) but rather on a new leaf.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Manhire quoted in O’Brien, ‘Some Paintings I Am Frequently Asked About’, 22.

¹⁸³ In Manhire and Hotere, *Malady* (Wellington: Wedge Press, 1997), np, one finds an insert on brown card that acknowledges the preceding edition of 1970, details the print run of the 1997 edition as ‘500 copies’, and states explicitly that ‘This new edition is published in association with the City Gallery exhibition HOTERE: OUT THE BLACK WINDOW.’

¹⁸⁴ A further complication is introduced by Hone Tuwhare’s poetry collection *Sap-wood & Milk, poems by Hone Tuwhare* (Dunedin: Caveman Press, c.1972). In addition to the front cover graphic, this book contains six reproductions of ink and watercolour wash drawings by Hotere (facing pages 1, 7, 10, 23, 26, 32) that are similar in style to those executed for *Malady* (1970). The illustrations in *Sap-wood & Milk* may be distinguished by virtue of the smaller, more

Further compounding the material and compositional differences, by which the three instantiations of the *Malady* book are distinguished, are their differing authorial attributions. Thus, Manhire claims sole authorship of the initial, hand-crafted iteration – although, it may be noted, this is not to suggest, necessarily, that Manhire ‘invented’ the forms and compositional strategies of ‘concrete/pattern’ verse.¹⁸⁵ Hence, even in relation to the first, hand-made version of *Malady*, the subjectivity expressed is neither simply nor immediately synonymous with a particular art subject called ‘Manhire’. In *Malady* (1970), the poem is prefigured by a title and author page on which, in handwritten script, is inscribed:

Malady

Bill Manhire

At the end of the book, one finds a page in which a final ink and wash drawing is accompanied by another credit, in a different hand, that reads:

DESIGN: Ralph Hotere¹⁸⁶

Hence, *Malady* (1970) accords authorial priority to Manhire, whose name ‘comes first’. Hotere’s name ‘comes after’ or ‘follows’ Manhire’s – almost in the nature of an afterthought or (more charitably, perhaps) a consummation. Insofar as ‘Manhire’ comes

approximately square format of Tuwhare’s book, the fact that five drawings are reproduced in colour, by their greater degree of pictorial complexity, and by the fact that, compared with the understated illustrations in *Malady* (1970), those in *Sap-wood & Milk* tend to dominate the spaces of the pages on which they are disposed.

¹⁸⁵ The existence of *carmina figurata* (poems in which there is evinced a pictorial disposition of words and/or letters) in Renaissance texts provides some indication of the longstanding practice of ‘concrete’ poetry, at least, in Western literature. A noteworthy, early twentieth century collection of concrete verse is Guillaume Apollinaire, *Calligrammes, poèmes de la paix et de la guerre 1913-1916* (*Calligrams, Poems of Peace and War 1913-1916*) (Paris: Mécure de France, 1918).

¹⁸⁶ Manhire, *Malady* (Dunedin: Amphedasma Press, 1970), np.

before the poem and ‘Hotere’ comes *after* the poem, implicitly, Hotere’s status as ‘designer’ is strictly subsidiary to Manhire’s status as ‘poet’; *poetry* takes precedence over *design*; *writing* takes precedence over *painting* (here, reduced in status to ‘design’ or ‘illustration’). Reflecting on the creation of *Malady* (1970) over two decades later, it is evident that Manhire still conceives of the work in terms of a bifurcation of authorial roles:

The first thing we did together was called *Malady* – though that’s the wrong way of putting it, because we’ve never exactly collaborated. I don’t think Ralph works as a collaborator. He has friendships and people he works with; he brings things to life in the gaps and spaces and accidents that other people – and circumstances – make available.¹⁸⁷

Here, however, it is striking to what degree Manhire’s assessment of the ‘collaborative’ nature of *Malady* (1970) contradicts the presentation (i.e., *designation* or *naming*) of *Malady* (1997). This later edition features a single title and author page that reads:

MALADY

Bill Manhire

Ralph Hotere¹⁸⁸

In other words, the authorial separation maintained in *Malady* (1970) is relaxed. Notwithstanding Manhire’s reification of authorial individuality in his account of the creation of *Malady* (1970), in *Malady* (1997), any *absolute* resolution of the subjectivity expressed in terms of particular subject positions or particular art subjects is precluded. On the contrary, the subjectivity expressed in *Malady* (1997) invites interpretation as a duality that resists further differentiation. That is to say, it no longer demands to be

¹⁸⁷ Manhire quoted in O’Brien, ‘Some Paintings I Am Frequently Asked About’, 22. Manhire’s qualification is acknowledged in O’Brien, *Hotere, Out The Black Window*, 55.

¹⁸⁸ Manhire and Hotere, *Malady*, np.

considered, *by necessity*, as a collaboration between or working in parallel of the individual art subjects ‘Manhire-the-poet’ and ‘Hotere-the-painter’ but rather offers to express the fundamentally ambiguous subjectivity enlivened by the dual figure of the *poet/painter Manhire/Hotere*.¹⁸⁹ In consequence, there is a similar disappearing of firm distinctions between poetry and painting – between that which is ‘purely’ textual, graphic, or *writing* and that which is ‘purely’ pictorial, plastic, or *drawing/painting*. Despite Manhire’s characterisation of *Malady* as a ‘concrete/pattern poem’, the divided authorship of *Malady* (1970) preserves distinctions between poetic patterning and painterly patterning, and thus invites interpretation as an ‘illustrated poem’. By contrast, in the vanishing of absolute distinctions between authorial roles, *Malady* (1997) admits consideration as a ‘poem-painting’ in which there is, perhaps, a fuller realisation of the possibilities of the medium – a more explicit presentation of writing-as-painting and painting-as-writing, graphic-as-plastic and plastic-as-graphic.

¹⁸⁹ Here, I should acknowledge that the possibility of so representing the complex subjectivity in question draws inspiration from the title of Simpson, *Answering hark: McCahon/Caselberg, painter/poet*.

1.4 Painting the gift of meaning

1.4.1 The gift of meaning

By way of concluding this opening discussion, it may be observed that, if the subjectivity/meaning-making expressed in *Victory over Death 2, Painting from "Malady"*, and related works admits consideration in terms of a tension obtaining between the individual and a *transindividual otherness* (i.e., a subjectivity that resists determination exclusively in terms of particular artist individuals or art subjects) then the works in question are that to which *one gives meaning* only insofar as, always already, *meaning is given to one* by an other (or, better perhaps, an *otherness*). Particularly relevant, in this regard, is the fact that the texts employed in the works under consideration were *gifts*. As Brown relates, Anne McCahon presented McCahon with a copy of *The New English Bible*, Kereama's book was given to McCahon following its discovery by his daughter, Catherine, and Hooper's book of poetry was a gift from Caselberg.¹⁹⁰ As previously noted, Manhire presented Hotere with a copy of the first, hand-fabricated version of the *Malady* book. Insofar as their 'source texts' were gifts, it is apparent that the meaning content of *Victory over Death 2, Painting from "Malady"*, and related works does not exclusively emanate from somewhere 'in' McCahon or 'in' Hotere or, indeed, 'in' the particular artworks and texts under consideration, but rather emerges in relation to a wider and pre-existing field of symbolic exchanges. Re-stating a point made earlier, this field is equivalent to language-mediated, social and cultural reality – what Lacan terms the 'big Other' or symbolic order.

¹⁹⁰ Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist* (1993), 145-46. See also Brown, 'Colin McCahon. Can you hear me St Francis, 1969', 161, and Simpson, *Answering hark*, 98-99. Simpson's account is, apparently, based on a document held in the Hocken archives. It is worth noting that there is another letter dated 4 June and addressed 'Dear John' in the McCahon Archives of the E.H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Folder 1, item 32, that contradicts Simpson's account in some respects. For example, in this document, McCahon seems to be introducing Caselberg (if, indeed, Caselberg is the 'Dear John' to whom the missive is addressed) to Hooper's poetry.

Here, what is at issue transcends the banal recognition that *Victory over Death 2, Painting from "Malady"*, and their siblings appropriate or incorporate fragments of pre-existing texts. The critical point to recognise is that, however novel these word paintings may be in their particulars, in their creation, neither McCahon nor Hotere formulates an entirely new manner of speaking and communicating. On the contrary, rather than painting some kind of 'original speech', both artists *employ* (or, better perhaps, *realise* certain meaning potentials inherent in) the symbols, syntax and grammar of a pre-existing system of language. That is to say, by virtue of the system of language, McCahon and Hotere *speak* only insofar as they *are spoken*: the subjectivity expressed in *Victory over Death 2, Painting from "Malady"*, and related works is neither wholly nor simply the subjectivity of a particular being or art subject called, respectively, 'McCahon' or 'Hotere' but rather a subjectivity that defines a relation of tension obtaining between the individual and the transindividual otherness of language *per se*.

The prominence thus far accorded to the determination of source *texts* should not obscure the fact that *language* (considered as the system within which, by virtue of the function of *representation/symbolisation*, are given *meaning/forms* or *forms of meaning*) necessarily encompasses writing and painting, graphic and plastic. Here, however, it may be objected that painting, even before it is *representation/symbolisation* – even before it *figures* or *means* – is simply mark-making. In a manner that recalls autonomic functions or instinctual acts, one might conceive of a mark-making that occurs entirely independently of subjectivity/meaning-making. How, then, is it tenable to claim that painting admits consideration as an expression of a pre-existing language, in relation to which, in the creation of *Victory over Death 2, Painting from "Malady"*, and related works, McCahon and Hotere are, respectively, *given voice*? In seeking to resolve this conundrum, I propose to draw a distinction between *mark-making* and *painting* proper. The term *painting* will be reserved for the mark-making that is also a meaning-making (or, rather, the actualisation of certain potentials that, in accordance with the function of *representation/symbolisation*, manifest as *meaning/forms*). It is on the basis of this distinction that one may conceive of a *language* of painting, in relation to which painting is a sign of subjectivity.

However, this is not to suggest that, in marking a surface with paint, the artist necessarily *knows* in advance (i.e., in the sense of *being conscious of*) what these marks *mean*. Indeed, for some artists (particularly those favouring the automatist mode of art-making associated with Dada and Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Gutai, Fluxus, etc.) the process of creation seems to proceed precisely from a position of *un-knowing* – at least, on the level of consciousness. Hence, Paul Klee’s oft-cited suggestion to the effect that the ‘primordial movement’ of creativity ‘knows’ or ‘is’ nothing beyond its own activity:

The primordial movement, the agent, is a point that sets itself in motion... A line comes into being...It goes out for a walk, so to speak, aimlessly for the sake of the walk.¹⁹¹

Also relevant (especially in view of certain definitions of the unconscious that will be discussed presently) are statements made by artists associated with Abstract Expressionism. For example, consider William Baziotes’ characterisation of the subject matter of his painting as that which, at the outset, he *does not know he knows* – i.e., a subject disclosed to consciousness only after the fact of its expression in painting:

There is always a subject that is uppermost in my mind. Sometimes I am aware of it. Sometimes not. I work on my canvas until I think it is finished. Often I recognize my subject at completion and again I may wait a long time before I know what it is about.¹⁹²

Baziotes’ observation harmonises with Jackson Pollock’s assertion that

¹⁹¹ Paul Klee, ‘Contributions to a theory of pictorial form,’ lecture notes, Bauhaus, Dessau, c.1921-2, reproduced in Jurg Spiller (ed), *Paul Klee: the thinking eye, the notebooks of Paul Klee*, trans Ralph Manheim (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co. Ltd, 1964, originally published as *Das bildnerische Denken* (Basle: Benno Schwabe & Co, 1956)), 105.

¹⁹² William Baziotes, artist’s statement written in 1945 and subsequently published in David Porter (ed), *Personal Statement: Painting Prophecy 1950* (Washington DC: David Porter Gallery, 1950), np, quoted in Maurice Tuchman, *The New York School, Abstract Expressionism in the 40s and 50s* (London: Thames and Hudson, c.1970), 39.

When I am *in* my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of "get acquainted" period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through.¹⁹³

The commentary above bears comparison with certain of McCahon's remarks in *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition*. In relation to *Practical Religion*, McCahon recalls:

I spent weeks painting my way over this story, more and more involved realising the great need for a new kind of painting to happen.¹⁹⁴

Leaving aside the question of whether *Practical Religion* really was a genuinely 'new kind of painting', it is significant that McCahon characterises its creation in terms of an unfolding realisation of the imperative *for such*. In other words, the creation of *Practical Religion* is presented as a journey towards the articulation of desire. To this extent, it constitutes a voyage of discovery towards knowledge and meaning that proceeds from an initial position of un-knowing. Also noteworthy is the entry accompanying *The Lark's Song*. Here, McCahon insists (implicitly addressing non-Māori language speakers) that one can understand and appreciate the work without knowing, necessarily, the precise meaning of its Māori text. Indeed, McCahon goes so far as to suggest that this innocent perspective is, precisely, how *The Lark's Song* ought to be appreciated:

The words must be read for their sound, they are signs for the lark's song.

...Please don't give yourself the pain of worrying out a translation of the words but try for the sound of the painting.¹⁹⁵

Significantly, however, McCahon adds a qualifying note: 'But never forget that these are the words of a poet too. Some people can read them.'¹⁹⁶ In other words, the validity or

¹⁹³ Jackson Pollock, 'My Painting' in *Possibilities*, v1, n1, Winter 1947-48, 79.

¹⁹⁴ McCahon and O'Reilly, *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition*, 36-37.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 36.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

efficacy of approaching the painting from a 'naïve' standpoint is secured by the inference that, in the final analysis, its painted text *means* for *someone*. Finally, one may observe the obvious resonance, in this context, of Hotere's artist statement included in the pamphlet accompanying the exhibition of *Zero* series paintings:

The series ZERO may be called an object of visual meditation, the essence of meditation being a personal discovery in a seeming void. I have provided for the spectator a starting point, which, upon contemplation may become a nucleus revealing scores of new possibilities. No object and certainly no painting is seen in the same way by everybody, yet most people want an unmistakable meaning which is accessible to all in a work of art. It is the spectator who provokes the change and the meaning in these works.¹⁹⁷

Here, it is significant that, firstly, Hotere takes responsibility only for providing the journey of meaning with its initial impetus. Secondly, Hotere insists that meaning-making is a process whose resolution is not only a matter of 'possibilities' but also, explicitly, possibilities to be realised in accordance with the desires and determinations of *others*.

1.4.2 Painting *in principle* and *in possibility*

In these examples, it is evident that the commentary offered by McCahon and Hotere echoes suggestions made by the likes of Baziotes or Pollock that, whilst one may not know the meaning of painting initially, *that* painting (i.e., the activity of painting) *is* meaningful (at least, *potentially*) is not in dispute. Hence, *that* painting *means* is not generally in question – even if what merits the appellation *painting* may come into being or be known as painting only *after the fact* of mark-making as the result of acts of meaning-making (i.e., determinations of meaning potentials) made by various art subjects (the artist, art viewers, art critics, etc.). In other words, prior to the attribution of meaning, one might say that the artist has not actually made a painting, only painted marks. Indeed, prior to the giving of meaning, the marked canvas does not even bear consideration as an

¹⁹⁷ Hotere, *Zero, an exhibition of paintings*.

expression of subjectivity (for example, the canvas may have been marked by a leak in the roof of the artist's studio or some other accidental process). To be sure, for an artist like Jean/Hans Arp, for whom the arbitrary fall of paper fragments validly might constitute a collage, an accidentally marked canvas, precisely, would be admissible as painting. However, the fact remains that the status of this marking *as painting* depends on a later subjective determination – the same kind of determination implicit in Marcel Duchamp's exhibiting of a prefabricated, porcelain urinal as *Fountain* (1917). Therefore, the meaning of painting is guaranteed in the sense that it is a meaning that one does not know one knows but that one will come to know and/or a meaning that is already known for one by an other. To anticipate points for later discussion, from the perspective of psychoanalysis, these two perspectives are functionally equivalent. That which one *does not know one knows* and that which is *known for one* (in the sense of being inscribed, recorded or remembered in an *other* 'place' or 'field' – i.e., language-mediated, intersubjective, social and cultural reality, the big Other, the symbolic order) are implicit in the notion of the unconscious.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ The idea that 'unconscious knowledge' is that which is *known for one* is expressed with particular clarity in Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 23:

The unconscious is not something one knows, but rather something that is known. What is unconscious is known *unbeknownst* to the "person" in question: it is not something one "actively," consciously grasps, but rather something which is "passively" registered, inscribed or counted. And this unknown knowledge is locked into the connection between signifiers; it consists in this very connection. *This kind of knowledge has no subject, nor does it need one.*

For some of Lacan's most pertinent observations on the nature of knowledge see, for example, Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XVII. The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Miller, trans with notes by Grigg (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co, 2007, originally published as *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre XVII. L'envers de la psychanalyse*, 1969-1970 (Paris: Seuil, 1991)), 30. Here, Lacan suggests that, in light of

...the theory of the unconscious... it is not at all self-evident that all knowledge, by virtue of being knowledge, is known as knowledge... What we discover in even the slightest bit of psychoanalytical experience is, indeed, of the order of knowledge [*savoir*]... and not of acquaintance [*connaissance*] or representation.

The context of Lacan's discussion implies that *connaissance* is that which is 'quietly articulated as the little master, as the ego' (i.e., knowledge articulated from the perspective of consciousness) whilst *savoir* refers to 'the foundation of what is known... precisely insofar as it is not known' but

Evidently, then, *mark-making* is a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition for painting. Equivalently, one might say that mark-making is *potentially* painting – but the realisation of this potential requires a retroactive act of meaning-making. Such a retroactive making of meaning reconstitutes and naturalises what is called ‘the meaning of the work’ within the province of a pre-existing system of language. Hence, that which *comes to be known* about painting admits consideration as that which is *always already known*, insofar as this meaning is an actualisation of the incipient potentials of the system of language, of which the language of painting is part. In consequence, what may be termed the ‘language of painting’ does not come forth from particular acts of painting as a purely original and authentic creation but rather demands to be considered as *pre-existing* this by virtue of the meaning potentials enlivened within the wider context of the discourse of painting. Therefore, in relation to this wider field, the language of painting is, evidently, no less *given* to McCahon and Hotere than the language of words. Indeed, to the extent a pre-existing system of language *enables* McCahon and Hotere to speak, write, or paint (that is, to find expression and communicate meaning *as subjects*), one simply reaffirms that the subjective field encompassing the particular art subjects called ‘McCahon’ and ‘Hotere’ is the transindividual otherness of *language per se*.

This proposition has some far-reaching implications for the nature of the relationship between subjectivity and painting. By way of anticipating matters for further discussion in later chapters, the question arises: if a pre-existing linguistic structure secures the possibility of speaking meaningfully then to what degree does speaking genuinely create or originate meaning, as opposed to merely parroting (or, perhaps, actualising, realising) meaning potentials already encoded within the possibilities of language? In other words, as previously noted, to what extent, in *Victory Over Death 2, Painting from “Malady”*, and related works, are McCahon and Hotere, respectively, *speaking* as opposed to *being spoken*? Paradoxically, it appears as if both conditions obtain. In the first place, both artists *select* and, invariably, *edit* texts, and *dispose* them in their paintings. That is to say,

which is evident in ‘the eruption of the entire phase of lapses and stumblings in which the unconscious is revealed.’

as previously noted, their painterly reproductions of pre-existing elements of language are not exact replications of source texts but rather manifest as repetitions that introduce differences. To this extent, McCahon and Hotere seem to behave like creative agents. At the same time, however, it is evident that, whatever ‘editorial’ revisions either artist makes in their word paintings, their texts inevitably play within the constellation of possibilities the system of language affords. Hence, the manner by which subjectivity is expressed in and through language is not absolutely free but rather subject to linguistic structures and the laws governing the disposition of those structures. Indeed, in relation to this latter point, one might view language as a system of permissions and prohibitions where, strictly speaking, that which is prohibited or impossible does not actually merit the label ‘bearer of meaning’ in the first place. It is by virtue of falling within the permissible parameters of language and meaning (even if these parameters are *not known* explicitly or consciously in advance) that painting may be distinguished from mark-making and speech from inarticulate noise. From this perspective it would appear that, in *Victory over Death 2*, *Painting from “Malady”*, and related works, even when there is a deviation from the script of *The New English Bible*, *The Tail of the Fish*, *Journey Towards an Elegy*, or the various iterations of *Malady* – or, indeed, a transgressing of the boundaries of what may be considered permissible as painting – to the extent these deviations and transgressions (come to) bear meaning they are expressed within the compass of language, always already inscribed there *in principle* and *in possibility*.

Let us summarise the discussion thus far. It has been suggested that the ambiguous and contradictory subjectivity evinced in *Victory over Death 2*, *Painting from “Malady”*, and related works is neither simply nor immediately synonymous with the particular art subjects called ‘McCahon’ and ‘Hotere’, respectively, but rather demands to be considered in terms of the intersection or relation of tension obtaining between the individual and the *transindividual* otherness equivalent to the discourse of painting as it functions within language-mediated, social and cultural reality. Within this discourse, then, painting, as an expression or sign of subjectivity/meaning-making, admits consideration in terms of the tension between *one painting* and/or *one meaning* and *an other painting* and/or *an other meaning*. In consequence, the works in question demand

consideration as that to which, paradoxically, *one gives meaning* only insofar as, always already, *meaning is given to one* by an other (or, to be precise, an *otherness*). To put the matter in equivalent terms, contradiction arises insofar as this complex subjectivity seems caught between agency (i.e., there is a creative reconfiguration of pre-existing, language-mediated structures) and automatism (i.e., these reconfigurations nevertheless remain within the compass of language, in principle and in possibility).

In seeking to unravel (or, at least, fruitfully re-state) this antinomy, it may be useful to consider that the term ‘an other meaning’ admits two interpretations. Firstly, ‘an other meaning’ implies ‘meaning that is made or given by an other’. That is to say, the ‘locus’ of meaning is ‘situated in’ or ‘enlivened by’ language *per se*, where language, thereby, admits consideration as an ‘other discourse’. Insofar as *Victory over Death 2, Painting from “Malady”*, and their siblings merely reiterate or remain within the structural imperatives of this other discourse, they seem to be the expressions of an automatism. Secondly, however, playing on the ambiguity between *an other* and *another*, ‘an other meaning’ also may imply the susceptibility of meaning to being supplemented or succeeded. Here, the inference is that, ultimately, meaning may be neither determinable nor immutable but rather, always already, inherently ambiguous and evanescent. To the extent works like *Victory over Death 2* and *Painting from “Malady”* involve a reconfiguration of given meaning (even if this re-making is inevitably subsumed within the structures and laws of language), they admit consideration as expressions of agency – albeit, an agency neither simply nor immediately synonymous with the ‘conscious ones’ called ‘McCahon’ and ‘Hotere’, respectively. In the following chapter, I seek to clarify the theoretical basis of the thesis as a whole by exploring the implications of this ambiguous mode of subjectivity/meaning-making in light of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Chapter 2 An other meaning: subjectivity, the unconscious, and language

2.1 An other meaning: the unconscious and language

2.1.1 An other meaning: subjectivity as agency *and* automatism

The efficacy of adopting Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to explore the ambiguous subjectivity that seems caught between agency and automatism may be illustrated through a consideration of what is implicit in the notion that language is an *otherness* in relation to which individual subjects are *given voice*. Here, it is evident that, in saying one is *given voice* or *spoken by* an other, the implication is that one is not sovereign over oneself – not the captain of one’s own ship, so to speak. The idea that *something else* is pulling one’s strings immediately raises the possibility that there is more to subjectivity than the sense ‘one’ has of ‘consciously’ exercising choice and agency. That is to say, what is placed in question is the notion that, necessarily and sufficiently, subjectivity is the expression of ‘ones that are conscious’ – which is precisely to place in question the conceptual prejudices inherent in the very notions of ‘oneness’ and ‘consciousness’ insofar as they relate to subjectivity. How is this so? In the first place, by definition, the ‘origin’ or ‘locus’ of the subjectivity that finds expression by virtue of a relation to *otherness* is not simply contiguous with, identical to, or contained within, a singular being or essence of self. On the contrary, the ‘centre’ or ‘essence’ of this subjectivity would appear to be, paradoxically, located ‘outside’ the self considered as a determinate, bounded entity. Equivalently, one may conceive of a self that is not identical to, or coincident with, itself – i.e., a self, *in itself*, alienated *from itself*. In various contexts, Lacan employs terms like ‘ex-centric’, ‘decentred’, ‘extimacy’ and ‘ex-sistence’ to define this aspect of subjectivity. Secondly, as a corollary to the self conceived as decentred, alienated, or non-self-identical, the subjectivity obtaining in the form of a relation with otherness also is, evidently, incompatible with models of the psyche according to which psychological phenomena are conceived entirely in terms of ‘perception-consciousness’ (i.e., a metaphysical relation of outside-inside obtaining between external world and inner self), where ‘consciousness’ is, itself, understood purely as ‘immediate presence-to self’ –

i.e., as simply and immediately equivalent to *self*-consciousness, the consciousness *one* has.¹⁹⁹

2.1.2 The unconscious in consciousness: ‘discontinuity’ and ‘vacillation’

In relation to what, then, is the subject (or, rather, *subjectivity*) to be thought if it is (1) given voice by the other of language and thereby (2) not simply a ‘one that is conscious’? The response of Lacanian psychoanalysis is the *unconscious* or, to be more precise, the *relationship of tension* between consciousness and the unconscious. This immediately begs two further questions that will be of primary concern in this chapter: (1) *what is the unconscious?* and (2) *what is the relationship between the unconscious and language such that language-mediated expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making evince a*

¹⁹⁹ The manner by which Lacanian theory conceives of subjectivity as de-centred, alienated, existing, demonstrates to what degree it incorporates elements of Hegelian and Heideggerian philosophy. In the former case, Lacan’s understanding of subjectivity as alienated – subjectivity obtaining in the form of a relation with otherness – is reminiscent of Hegel’s understanding of subjectivity in terms of a dialectic of other and same. In Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans A.V. Miller, with an Analysis of the Text and Forward by J.N. Findlay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, originally published as *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Bamberg and Würzburg: Joseph Anton Goebhardt, 1807)), 111-19, this is exemplified by the so-called dialectic of ‘master and slave’ or ‘Lordship and Bondage’. I will revisit this aspect of Lacanian theory in chapter four. In the latter case, the term ‘ex-sistence’ derives from Heidegger’s concept of ‘ek-sistence’ – itself, a modification of the ancient Greek word *ekstasis*. Heidegger’s terminology is briefly elaborated in section 8.2.

For a reference to Lacan’s conception of the subject as ‘ex-centric’ or ‘decentred’, see Lacan, *Seminar II*, 9. For references to Lacan’s use of ‘extimacy’ see, for example, *ibid*, *Seminar VII*. Here, Lacan characterises the ‘central place... that is the Thing’ as an ‘intimate exteriority or “extimacy” ’ (139) (where, as noted in the thesis Prologue, the Thing or *das Ding* admits consideration as an expression of the structurally necessary, real-as-impossibility implicated in processes of representation/symbolisation). Lacan also asserts that ‘*das Ding* is at the center only in the sense that it is excluded’ (71). As noted in Evans, 58-59, the term ‘extimacy’ or ‘*extimité*’ is created by combining the French words *extérieur* (exterior) and *intimité* (intimacy). As Evans relates, further, ‘extimacy’ exemplifies the manner by which the Lacanian conceptions of the so-called order of the real, the unconscious and the decentred subject problematise the metaphysical opposition of inside/outside. For references to Lacan’s employment of ‘ex-sistence’ or ‘ek-sistence’ see, for example, Lacan, ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter” ’, 6, where ‘ex-sistence’ is characterised as ‘the eccentric place... in which we must necessarily locate the subject of the unconscious’. The term ‘ek-sistence’ is also widely employed in *ibid*, *Seminar XXII*. Here, for example, in the context of a discussion devoted to the manner of the ‘knotting’ or interface between the orders of the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic, Lacan asserts: ‘ek-sistence is... only this outside which is not a not-inside’ (Seminar 3, 14 January 1975, 49).

tension between consciousness and the unconscious? With regard to the first of these considerations, the critical point to bear in mind is that ‘what’ might be termed ‘the Lacanian unconscious’ shares with ‘the Lacanian subject’ the property of resisting objective or metaphysical determination. That is to say, the Lacanian unconscious is neither a metaphysical entity nor an aspect of such amenable to conscious acts of measurement and delineation – for example, as is implicit in the notion of the conscious ego: an autonomous, irreducible kernel of self-presence.

Relevant, in this regard, are various statements Lacan makes in *Seminar II* and ‘Position of the Unconscious’ (1960). In the former case, Lacan emphasises to what degree he considers the unconscious to be of a completely different order than the ego. Thus Lacan asserts: ‘The unconscious completely eludes that circle of certainties by which man recognises himself as ego’ and insists: ‘not only is there an absolute dissymmetry between the subject of the unconscious and the organisation of the ego, but also a radical difference.’²⁰⁰ Lacan also refers to the ‘decentred subject’ as ‘the subject beyond the subject, the subject of the unconscious.’²⁰¹ In ‘Position of the Unconscious’, Lacan reiterates that the unconscious is, strictly speaking, neither a substrate of beings nor of consciousness (i.e., in the sense of being an inverse, obverse or polar opposite). Hence, Lacan asserts: ‘The unconscious *is* a concept founded on the trail [*trace*] left by that which operates to constitute the subject’ and ‘The unconscious *is not* a species defining the circle of that part of psychical reality which does not have the attribute (or the virtue) of consciousness.’²⁰² Indeed, by way of a brief discussion of what might be signified by the term ‘“un-black”... namely the set of what could be classified according to the various meanings of the word “black,” by dint of its refusal of the attribute (or virtue) of blackness (whether physical or moral)’²⁰³, Lacan implies that the unconscious

²⁰⁰ Lacan, *Seminar II*, 8, 59.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 210.

²⁰² Ibid, ‘Position of the Unconscious’ in *Écrits* (2006) (originally presented as ‘Position de l’inconscient’ at the Bonneval Colloquium, 30 October – 2 November 1960, and originally published in *Écrits* (1966)), 703.

²⁰³ Ibid, 704.

is precisely ‘that’ which escapes metaphysical determinations such as ‘is’ and ‘is not’, ‘being’ and ‘non-being’.

As Sean Homer aptly puts it, the concept of the unconscious presents the following conundrum:

According to Lacan we cannot know what *the* unconscious is. Indeed, it is not a thing as such but a hypothesis; we cannot know the unconscious, but only deduce it from a subject’s speech.²⁰⁴

Such a characterisation of the unconscious is evident in ‘Function and Field’. Here, Lacan asserts:

The unconscious is that part of concrete discourse qua transindividual, which is not at the subject’s disposal in reestablishing the continuity of his conscious discourse.²⁰⁵

This pithy statement expresses three crucial (and, indeed, interrelated) ideas. Firstly, the unconscious is a ‘transindividual... part of concrete discourse’ – that is, an aspect of subjects’ speech (or, more generally, of language-mediated expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making) *transcending* subjects considered as particular beings or individuals. Secondly, by virtue of its transcendental status, the unconscious is ‘not at the subject’s disposal’ – i.e., it exceeds the power and awareness of ‘ones that are conscious’. Thirdly, in characterising the unconscious as a dimension of subjectivity unavailable to the subject seeking to recuperate ‘the continuity of... conscious discourse’, Lacan infers that the unconscious manifests as a discontinuity *in consciousness*. This is, precisely, to affirm that language-mediated expressions of subjectivity evince a *tension* between consciousness and the unconscious.

²⁰⁴ Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 79.

²⁰⁵ Lacan, ‘Function and Field’, 214.

That the unconscious ‘manifests’ in the form of a discontinuity or, indeed, *symptomatic disturbance*, in conscious expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making is particularly clear from Lacan’s comments in *Seminar XI*:

I have spelt out to you point by point the functioning of what was first produced for us by Freud as the phenomenon of the unconscious. In the dream, in parapraxis, in the flash of wit – what is it that strikes one first? It is the sense of impediment to be found in all of them.

Impediment, failure, split. In a spoken or written sentence something stumbles. Freud is attracted by these phenomena, and it is there that he seeks the unconscious.

On this basis, Lacan suggests:

Discontinuity, then, is the essential form in which the unconsciousness first appears to us as a phenomenon – discontinuity in which something is manifested as a vacillation.²⁰⁶

‘The Interpretation of Dreams’ provides an apposite illustration of the Freudian basis of Lacan’s thinking. Here, Freud asserts that ‘the dream... [is] only the first member of a class’ of ‘psychoneurotic symptoms’ which ‘*are to be regarded as fulfilments of unconscious wishes*’²⁰⁷ and that, furthermore, there is a ‘complete identity between the characteristic features of the dream-work and those of the psychical activity which issues in psychoneurotic symptoms’ – namely, the expression of ‘*an unconscious wish, derived from infancy and in a state of repression*’.²⁰⁸ In Freud’s view, ‘these unconscious wishes are always on the alert, ready at any time to find their way to expression when an opportunity arises for allying themselves with an impulse from the conscious and for transferring their own great intensity on to the latter’s lesser one.’²⁰⁹ Consequently, with

²⁰⁶ Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 25.

²⁰⁷ See, for example, Freud, ‘The Interpretation of Dreams (second part)’ in SE, v5, 569.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 597-98. What, precisely, is implied by the Freudian ‘dream-work’ and the phenomena of ‘repression’ will merit further discussion in following sections.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 553.

reference to his first psychical ‘topography’ of unconscious, preconscious, and conscious ‘systems’, Freud proposes that ‘we may speak of an unconscious thought seeking to convey itself into the preconscious so as to be able then to force its way through to consciousness’ – although he cautions, further, that, strictly speaking, the so-called unconscious and preconscious ‘systems’ are ‘not in any way psychical entities themselves and can never be accessible to our psychical perception’.²¹⁰ This is to reiterate that, in both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, the unconscious and the preconscious are, strictly speaking, *hypotheses* invoked to explain certain symptomatic phenomena registered *in consciousness*. Notwithstanding this important qualification, Freud suggests that ‘the unconscious... is found as a function of two separate systems... one of them, which we term the *Ucs.*, is also *inadmissible to consciousness*, while we term the other the *Pcs.* because its excitations... are able to reach consciousness.’ Hence, ‘the system *Pcs.* stands like a screen between the system *Ucs.* and consciousness.’²¹¹

2.1.3 The unconscious as the Other’s discourse and the unconscious as structured like a language

²¹⁰ Ibid, 610-11. See also *ibid*, ‘The Psychopathology of Everyday Life’ (1901) in SE, v6, 61-64, 239, 255-59, where it is proposed that similarly disruptive unconscious processes are involved in slips of the tongue and other parapraxes, and *ibid*, ‘Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious’ (1905) in SE, v8, 165-170, where parallels are drawn between the unconscious phenomena characteristic of dreams and those manifest in jokes.

I would point out that Freud’s allusions to unconscious psychical *processes* seem incompatible with his parallel characterisations of the unconscious as an *atemporal* and, indeed, *indestructible*, psychical *structure* or *system*. This ambiguity (which also is present in Lacan’s writing) is discussed in section 8.4. For the purposes of the present study, I would suggest that references to unconscious psychical processes ought to be taken figuratively, as opposed to literally. In chapter three, the idea of unconscious psychical processes will be superseded by a more nuanced understanding of subjectivity in terms of a ‘real writing’ or ‘writing in the real’.

²¹¹ Freud, ‘The Interpretation of Dreams (second part)’ (1900) in SE, v5, 614-15. For further references to Freud’s positing of the unconscious and the preconscious as psychical ‘systems’ mediating between perception and consciousness, see *ibid*, 536-42. See section 8.5 for further discussion of Freud’s psychical topography of *Ucs.*, *Pcs.*, and *Cs.* ‘systems’, and the disposition of these systems in a psychical homeostasis maintained by the mediation of the *primary process* (or *pleasure principle*) by the *secondary process* (or *reality principle*).

That Lacan posits a resonance between the unconscious and language is already implicit in his claim that the unconscious manifests as an inaccessible part of ‘concrete discourse’ or as a discontinuity in conscious expressions of *meaning-making*.²¹² On this basis, the second consideration noted previously is enlivened, namely: *what is the relationship between the unconscious and language such that language-mediated expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making evince a tension between consciousness and the unconscious?* How Lacan approaches this question is implicit in the two, well-known aphorisms by which he summarises his conception of the relationship between the unconscious and language – namely, ‘the subject’s unconscious is the other’s discourse’²¹³ and ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’.²¹⁴ Let us, briefly, elaborate each of these constructions in turn.

²¹² The reference to ‘conscious expressions of meaning-making’ exposes a certain ambiguity in this project that demands further clarification. Often, it will be convenient to speak of meaning *made, determined, or posited in consciousness*. Taken literally, this wording would appear to imply that consciousness enjoys a degree of agency and/or self-sufficiency. Indeed, one may be tempted to conclude that expressions of subjectivity involve a *dual* agency – part conscious, part unconscious. Here, however, it is necessary to understand that what is termed ‘consciousness’ and what is termed ‘the unconscious’ are conceptual *abstractions* that, strictly speaking, cannot be isolated apart from their reciprocal entanglement within the field of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making. More rigorously, then, what is ‘primary’ is ‘subjectivity’ or ‘subjective experience’ *per se*, within which meaning is posited/determined *and* subject to ambiguity. What is proper to this subjectivity is the process or function of representation/symbolisation – a thinking *in* and *as* signs. Insofar as subjective experience precisely involves making determinations that, *at the same time*, evince discontinuities, ambiguities, and contradictions, it may be hypothesised, variously, in terms of (1) a ‘tension’ between ‘consciousness’ and ‘the unconscious’, (2) a tension between the individual ‘one that is conscious’ and the *transindividual* otherness of language-mediated, intersubjective social and cultural reality, the greater part of which is, practically speaking, repressed and, therefore, unconscious, or, indeed, (3) a primordial, real, material force. *Qua hypotheses*, however, it should be apparent that, always already, that which is posited as grounding or engendering subjective experience is *abstracted from* subjective experience.

²¹³ Lacan, ‘Function and Field’, 219. For some other contexts, in which Lacan refers to the unconscious as the other’s discourse, see *ibid*, *Seminar II*, 89, *ibid*, *Seminar III*, 112, and *ibid*, ‘The Instance of the Letter’, 436.

²¹⁴ For some references to the claim that ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’, see *ibid*, *Seminar III*, 166-67 and *ibid*, *Seminar XI*, 149, 203.

I should point out that, in the 1970s, Lacan’s claim that ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’ is superseded by the idea that ‘the unconscious is structured like *lalangue*’. Here, by way of anticipating discussion in chapters three and four, one might say that *lalangue* is the ‘real’ *trace structure* or *lettering* of language, the manifestation of which, in the emission of inchoate

Of particular relevance to the idea that ‘the subject’s unconscious is the other’s discourse’ is the distinction between ‘little other’ and ‘big Other’ Lacan introduces in *Seminar II*:

We must distinguish two *others*... an other with a capital *O*, and an other with a small *o*, which is the ego. In the function of speech, we are concerned with the *Other*.²¹⁵

As Evans points out, the term ‘little other’ encompasses both the ego and the mirror image in which the ego sees itself reflected (or, equivalently, the counterpart onto which the ego projects itself), thereby fabricating and sustaining an illusory or imaginary sense of self-unity and self-sufficiency. By contrast, ‘The big Other designates radical alterity, an other-ness which transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification’ and, on this basis, is equivalent to what Lacan terms the symbolic order: the ‘transindividual’, law-governed structure of language-mediated, social and cultural reality.²¹⁶ Also relevant is Lacan’s commentary in *Seminar III*, where one finds a reference to the ‘big Other of intersubjectivity... the Other of... the stable system of the world, of the object, and, between the two, speech, with its three stages of the signifier, meaning, and discourse.’²¹⁷ On the basis of this distinction between little other and big Other, then, it should be apparent that, in the present context, a more precise expression of Lacan’s aphorism is: ‘the unconscious is the Other’s discourse’.

Whilst not stated *explicitly*, the claim that ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’ is clearly *implicit* in several observations Lacan makes in ‘Function and Field’. In the first place, the linguistic orientation of Lacan’s thinking is immediately evident

and/or nonsensical sounds, testifies to the aforementioned tension between consciousness and the unconscious. For discussion of *lalangue* see, for example, Lacan, *Seminar XX*, 138-39.

²¹⁵ Ibid, *Seminar II*, 235-36.

²¹⁶ Evans, 132-33.

²¹⁷ Lacan, *Seminar III*, 74.

when he refers to Freud's 'The Interpretation of Dreams' as providing a salutary reminder that 'a dream has the structure of a... rebus – that is, of a form of writing', the 'telling' of which (e.g., in a clinical setting) is characterised by two primary features: 'syntactical displacements' and 'semantic condensations'.²¹⁸ Secondly, Lacan asserts that 'a symptom is... structured like a language' and (employing the terminology associated with Saussure's linguistics) that 'A symptom... is the signifier that has been repressed from the subject's consciousness.'²¹⁹ Hence, the idea that the unconscious is structured like a language follows from the characterisation of symptoms as (1) structured like a language and (2) repressed from consciousness – i.e., *unconscious*.

The suggestion that 'the subject's unconscious is the other's discourse' (or, equivalently, that the unconscious dimension of expressions of subjectivity is 'transindividual') implies that the unconscious is an absolutely 'outside' alterity manifesting 'inside' subjects (or, to be more precise, in conscious expressions of subjectivity), in relation to which subjects are, therefore, decentred. From a Lacanian perspective, the force of this evident antimony illustrates how the fields of subjectivity and the unconscious resist determination in metaphysical terms. However, notwithstanding this 'anti-metaphysical' tenor, Lacan's second formula, 'the unconscious is structured like a language', clearly implies that the unconscious is, nevertheless, *law-governed* in such a way that its effects, as manifest *in consciousness*, are amenable to analysis. On this basis, the question raised above admits the equivalent formulation: *what are the structures and laws governing language-mediated expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making such that these expressions evince a tension between consciousness and the unconscious?*

²¹⁸ Ibid, 'Function and Field', 221-22.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 223, 232.

2.2 Structuring the dream-work: condensation and displacement of representatives of the representation

2.2.1 *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*: the word, the thing, and the signifier

In his works of the mid to late 1950s, Lacan seeks to explicate the aforementioned structures and laws, according to which language-mediated expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making are governed, by recasting Freudian psychoanalysis in light of the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson. In the first place, then, Lacan identifies what, in Freud's essays 'Repression' (1915), and 'The Unconscious' (1915), is termed *Vorstellung* or *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* with what, in Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), is referred to as the *signifier*. Secondly, Lacan identifies what, in Freud's 'The Interpretation of Dreams', is termed *condensation* and *displacement* with what, in Jakobson's essay 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances' (1956), is referred to as *metaphor* and *metonymy*.²²⁰ By way of setting the stage for the discussion in sections 2.3 and 2.4, let us briefly examine each of these identifications in turn.

What, then, does Freud mean by *Vorstellung* and *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*? Notwithstanding a certain degree of ambiguity surrounding these terms, *Vorstellung* may be said to connote a mental or psychical phenomenon that, in the form of an *idea* or *image*, represents what Freud defines as *Trieb* – i.e., *instincts* or, better perhaps, *instinctual drives*.²²¹ These are the animating principles of the organism, which, in

²²⁰ It may be noted that, in Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances' in Jakobson and Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, 81, there is also an appeal to the Freudian concepts of condensation and displacement. Here, however, Jakobson's attribution differs from Lacan's. Metonymy is associated with condensation *and* displacement, whilst metaphor is related to Freudian 'identification' and 'symbolism'.

²²¹ The degree to which Freud's '*Trieb*' is insufficiently translated as 'instinct' is addressed in Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 49. In Lacan's colourful language, '*Trieb* gives you a kick in the arse, my friends – quite different from so-called *instinct*.' That is to say, in contrast to the relatively

Freudian theory, also are characterised in terms of the so-called *primary process* or the *pleasure principle*. Thus, in ‘Repression’, Freud defines an ‘instinctual representative’ as ‘an idea... [*Vorstellung*] or group of ideas which is cathected [i.e., affectively or emotionally charged or invested] with a definite quota of psychical energy (libido or interest) coming from an instinct.’²²² Moreover, in ‘The Unconscious’, Freud draws a Kantian distinction between the instinct and its psychical representative such that the instinct takes on the aura of an objectively real, yet unknowable, ‘thing-in-itself’, whilst the idea, as a subjective, psychical representation, is precisely that which may become an object of knowledge.²²³ Finally, Freud suggests that if one follows the psychical topography of unconscious, preconscious and conscious systems (i.e., *Ucs.*, *Pcs.*, and *Cs.*) then ‘the *Cs.* phase of an idea implies a fresh registration of it, which is situated in another place’.²²⁴ Consciousness, then, is conceived by Freud as that which contains ‘fresh registrations’ of *Vorstellung* – that is to say, representations of unconscious ideas that are, themselves, representations of instincts. In consequence, what is encountered in consciousness, by way of the mediation of the preconscious, is a second order representation – and thus merits the appellation *representative of the representation: Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*.

Subsequently, Freud suggests that what is experienced in consciousness can be separated into ‘word-presentations’ or *Wortvorstellungen* and ‘thing-presentations’ or

passive, autonomic, stimulus-response character of instincts, *Trieb* connotes a driving force characterised by a much greater degree of urgency and activity.

²²² Freud, ‘Repression’ (1915) in SE, v14, 152.

²²³ For a reference to the distinction Freud makes between instincts and ideas, see, for example, *ibid.*, ‘The Unconscious’ (1915) in SE, v14, 177, where Freud asserts:

...the antithesis of conscious and unconscious is not applicable to instincts. An instinct can never become an object of consciousness – only the idea that represents the instinct can. Even in the unconscious, moreover, an instinct cannot be represented otherwise than by an idea... When we... speak of an unconscious instinctual impulse... We can only mean an instinctual impulse the ideational representative of which is unconscious...

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

Sachevorstellungen. On this basis, Freud makes the following distinction between conscious and unconscious presentations:

...the conscious presentation is the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone.²²⁵

Hence,

The system *Ucs.* contains the thing cathexes of the objects, the first and true object-cathexes; the system *Pcs.* comes about by this thing-presentation being hypercathected through being linked with the word presentations corresponding to it.²²⁶

Here, it may be observed that, firstly, the term *hypercathected* seems to imply a *re-cathecting* or *over-cathecting*, thus reiterating that what presents in consciousness by virtue of the preconscious are not merely *Vorstellungen* but *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*. Secondly, these hypercathexes result in dualistic, psychical formations that are, in effect, ‘thing-words’ or ‘word-things’ – that is to say, *forms that mean, forms of meaning, meaning/forms*.

In a critical passage in *Seminar VII*, Lacan states explicitly that these meaning/forms are, in linguistic terms, synonymous with the signifier. Thus, Lacan characterises as unconscious those

...thought processes insofar as they regulate by means of the pleasure principle the investment of the *Vorstellungen*, and the structure in which the unconscious is organised... And it is this which makes the small curds of representation, that is to say, something which has the same structure as the signifier – a point on which I

²²⁵ Ibid, 201.

²²⁶ Ibid, 201-02.

insist. That is not just *Vorstellung*, but as Freud writes later in the same article on the unconscious, *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*...²²⁷

Notwithstanding certain ambiguities in Lacan's phrasing, it is crucial to appreciate that *Vorstellungen* are unconscious and thus, strictly speaking, inadmissible to consciousness. *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, by contrast, are preconscious and thus, potentially, able to be registered in consciousness. That Lacan preserves this distinction would appear to be implicit in his insistence that 'we must distinguish the effective articulation of a discourse, of the gravitation of the *Vorstellungen*, in the form of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* of these unconscious articulations.'²²⁸ Where, however, Lacan departs from Freud is in the problematic opposition of *Wortvorstellung* and *Sachevorstellung* implicit in Freud's suggestion that the *Pcs.* and *Cs.* contain these presentations in combination, whilst the *Ucs.* contains thing-presentations alone. Clearly, Freud's conception of the *Ucs.*, as a system of 'pure forms' entirely divorced from meaning is, *prima facie*, incompatible with Lacan's thesis that the unconscious is structured like a language – a 'problem' or 'impasse' Lacan attributes to 'the state of linguistics in... [Freud's] time.'²²⁹ By way of ameliorating the difficulty, Lacan highlights the difference between the two words, in German, for 'thing' – namely *die Sache* (i.e., matter, content, substance) and *das Ding* (i.e., condition of possibility, enabling principle, structuring rule or law).²³⁰ In Lacan's view, it is by invoking this distinction that one

²²⁷ Lacan, *Seminar VII*, 61. On other occasions, Lacan also refers to 'the system of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, or in other words, of the signifying elements in the psyche' (103), and 'the signifying network... the network of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*' (118).

²²⁸ Ibid, 62. Again, Lacan's wording is somewhat ambiguous. However, I would suggest that the expression 'distinguish the effective articulation of a discourse' means: 'define the dimension of discourse that is, ultimately, expressed in consciousness by virtue of the filtering or mediation of the preconscious'.

²²⁹ Ibid, 44-45.

²³⁰ As noted in *ibid*, 43-44, there is only one word in French for 'thing': 'la chose'... which derives from the Latin word "causa". Its etymological connection to the law suggests to us something that presents itself as the wrapping and designation of the concrete.' Lacan affirms that, 'in German, too, "thing" in its original sense concerns the notion of a proceeding, deliberation, or legal debate.' That said, Lacan suggests that '*Das Ding* may imply not so much a legal proceeding itself as the assembly which makes it possible, the *Volksversammlung*' (43). By

might reconcile Freud's faulty terminology with his, otherwise, praiseworthy understanding and formulation of the

...distinction to be made between the operation of language as a function – namely, the moment when it is articulated and, in effect, plays an essential role in the preconscious – and the structure of language, as a result of which those elements put in play in the unconscious are organized.²³¹

Subsequently, Lacan conceives of the unknowable force or structuring principle, in accordance with which the *Vorstellungen* 'gravitate', in terms of *das Ding*. In *Seminar VII*, *das Ding* is defined as 'the beyond-of-the-signified' or 'the Thing' in its 'dumb reality' – i.e., as an expression of the real.²³² Strictly speaking, then, *das Ding* expresses the *structuring of structure* and thus exceeds and eludes (in the sense of being impossible to include in the terms of reference of) that which is so structured.²³³ That is to say, the 'real' structuring principle of the unconscious that is structured like a language is precisely that which utterly transcends linguistic determination. To this extent, *das Ding* harmonises with Lacan's assertion in *Seminar I*: 'the real, or what is perceived as such, is

contrast, '*Sache* is the thing that is juridically questioned or, in our vocabulary, the transition to the symbolic order of a conflict between men' (44).

²³¹ Ibid, 44-45.

²³² Ibid, 54, 55. Here, I would suggest that, notwithstanding certain ambiguities in Lacan's terminology, the 'real' associated with the account of *das Ding* in *Seminar VII* may be usefully understood in the context of the elaboration of the structural logic of the signifying chain in *Seminar II* and the 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter" '. As noted in the thesis Prologue, this implies that the Lacanian real is neither simply nor immediately to be conceived in metaphysical terms as a 'material substrate' akin to a Kantian realm of 'things-in-themselves'. Rather, Lacan's discussion of *das Ding* ushers in the conception of what, in the thesis Prologue, has been characterised as the structurally necessary order of the impossible synonymous with, yet inassimilable to, the function of representation/symbolisation.

²³³ Considered as a 'real' 'structuring of structure', Lacan's employment of the term *das Ding* resonates with the Derridean conception of trace and *différance*, and also Heidegger's consideration of the being or 'thingliness' of a peasant's jug or vase in 'The Thing' (1951). These matters merit further discussion in section 8.2.

what resists symbolisation absolutely.’²³⁴ In effect, Lacan transforms the Freudian distinction between *Ucs.* and *Pcs.*, *Vorstellungen* and *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, into the difference between a ‘real’ structuring or conditioning of possibility and a signifying structure that is, thereby, rendered possible. The instrumental point is that, within the signifying structure subsequently enlivened, this ‘real’ structuring or conditioning of possibility is, ‘in itself’, an impossibility. Hence, from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, there is no possibility of separating *Sachevorstellungen* and *Wortvorstellungen*, let alone conceiving of a psychical substrate or system in which there are produced *Vorstellungen* that are only *Sachevorstellungen*. In the first instance, consciousness, as the ‘default’ perspective of subjectivity, simply *is* experience of a field of inextricably entangled meaning/forms, or signs, and certain discontinuities or disturbances in this field (i.e., the aforementioned tension between consciousness and the unconscious). What Freud calls *Sachevorstellung* must be regarded as an abstraction of conscious experience and thus, in common with the conceptions of the unconscious and the real, a hypothesis invoked to account for certain symptomatic phenomena encountered *in* consciousness. As Lacan puts it:

The straw of words only appears to us as straw insofar as we have separated it from the grain of things, and it was first the straw which bore that grain.²³⁵

2.2.2 Condensation and displacement; metaphor and metonymy

In Lacanian theory, the manner by which *das Ding* testifies to a structuring of structure is articulated, further, via a linguistic transformation of the Freudian tropes of condensation and displacement into the Jakobsonian tropes of metaphor and metonymy. For example, in *Seminar VII*, Lacan suggests that, by virtue of conceiving of the preconscious as a realm of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen*, Freud

²³⁴ Lacan, *Seminar I*, 66. As noted in Evans, 205, if *das Ding* names the unknowable ‘thing in the real’ then ‘*die Sache* is the representation of the thing in the symbolic order’ – i.e., the Thing in accordance with the language-mediated function of representation/symbolisation.

²³⁵ Lacan, *Seminar VII*, 45.

...thus turns *Vorstellung* into an associative and combinatory element. In that way the world of *Vorstellung* is already organized according to the possibilities of the signifier as such. Already at the level of the unconscious there exists an organization that, as Freud says, is not necessarily that of contradiction or of grammar, but the laws of condensation and displacement, those that I call the laws of metaphor and metonymy.²³⁶

Lacan's comment resonates with the succinct definition Freud provides in 'The Unconscious'. Here, with regard to the 'mobility' of 'cathectic intensities [in the *Ucs.*]' (i.e., the manner by which psychical charges pass among *Vorstellungen* – which is to say, in Lacan's parlance, the laws or processes governing their 'exchanges', 'gravitation', or 'modulation'), Freud asserts:

By the process of *displacement* one idea may surrender to another its whole quota of cathexis; by the process of *condensation* it may appropriate the whole cathexis of several other ideas. I have proposed to regard these two processes as distinguishing marks of the so-called *primary psychical process*.²³⁷

With regard to Lacan's subsequent linguistic transformation of it, two features of Freud's conception of condensation and displacement are particularly relevant. Firstly, Freud conceives of condensation and displacement as sub-processes or 'distinguishing marks' of the '*primary psychical process*'. That is to say, condensation and displacement are aspects of that which 'really' or 'primordially' structures the system *Ucs.* 'before' or

²³⁶ Ibid, 61. Also relevant in this context is Lacan's assertion that, in the conscious articulation of dreams, there is a 'representation' that, as

...Freud tells us... overlooks that structure, that most profound gravitation, which is established at the level of the *Vorstellungen*. And he affirms that these *Vorstellungen* gravitate, operate exchanges and are modulated according to the laws that you will recognise, if you have followed my teaching, as the fundamental laws of the signifying chain. (62)

That is to say, *condensation* and *displacement*; *metaphor* and *metonymy*.

For some other contexts in which Lacan asserts this equivalence, see, for example, *ibid*, *Seminar III*, 221, and *ibid*, 'The Instance of the Letter', 425.

²³⁷ Freud, 'The Unconscious' (1915) in SE, v14, 186.

‘apart from’ language. Secondly, with regard to the *form* of the linguistic operations of metaphor and metonymy, Freud suggests that condensation involves a *superposition* of cathexes from an indefinite number of *Vorstellungen*, whilst displacement involves a *transfer* or *passage* of cathexis from one *Vorstellungen* to another.

Freud’s succinct definition of condensation and displacement in ‘The Unconscious’ follows the more comprehensive account presented in ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’. Here, Freud characterises condensation and displacement as psychological processes governing the transfers of cathexes among *latent dream-thoughts* (i.e., by implication, primary processes that obtain in the system *Ucs.*). Subsequently, the filtering, censoring, mediation of the secondary process determines which latent dream-thoughts are transmuted into *manifest dream-content* (i.e., which latent dream-thoughts are admitted to the system *Pcs.* and thus, potentially, able to become conscious). In the first place, then, Freud invokes the term *condensation* to account for the fact that ‘Dreams [or, to be precise, their manifest content] are brief, meagre and laconic in comparison with the range and wealth of the [latent] dream-thoughts.’²³⁸ Indeed, with reference to his ‘Dream of the Botanical Monograph’, Freud suggests that the manifest dream-content comprises a relatively small number of elements that constitute

...‘nodal points’ upon which a great number of the dream-thoughts converged... each of the elements of the dream’s content turns out to have been ‘overdetermined’ – to have been represented in the dream-thoughts many times over.²³⁹

Freud thereby concludes that the relationship between manifest dream-content and latent dream-thoughts is such that

Not only are the elements of a dream determined by the dream-thoughts many times over, but the individual dream-thoughts are represented in the dream by

²³⁸ Ibid, ‘The Interpretation of Dreams (first part)’ in SE, v4, 279.

²³⁹ Ibid, 283.

several elements. Associative paths lead from one element of the dream to several dream-thoughts, and from one dream-thought to several elements of the dream.²⁴⁰

Here, it is worth noting that Freud's account of the 'overdetermination' of dream-thoughts anticipates the Lacanian conception of what, in section 2.3, is characterised as the 'psychical function of meaning repression/overdetermination'. Similarly, Freud's conception of dream elements that function as '“nodal points”' for the compositing of densities of meaning anticipates the Lacanian understanding of what, in section 2.4, is characterised as the 'precipitation' of symptomatic formations or *points de capiton*.

Secondly, Freud observes that an important 'corollary' of the overdetermination intrinsic to condensation is that no univocal relationship obtains between particular elements of the manifest dream-content and the latent dream-thoughts.²⁴¹ In consequence, Freud suggests that 'The dream is, as it were, differently centred from the dream-thoughts – its content has different elements as its central point.'²⁴² *Displacement*, then, is defined as that which constitutes this 'shift' of the centre of the dream – a shift that defines the difference between the latent dream-thoughts and the manifest dream-content, and which, in consequence, is a fundamental feature of the dream-work *per se*. The 'corollary' to which Freud alludes implies that condensation and displacement are, in effect, simultaneous or reciprocal processes in the dream-work. Hence, the overdeterminations intrinsic to condensation displace the 'centre' of the dream – i.e., perturb or change its meaning. By the same token, the dream centre thus displaced constitutes a new 'nodal point' (or collection of nodal points), on which basis further condensations and overdeterminations may proceed. This simultaneity of or reciprocity between

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 284.

²⁴¹ In *ibid*, 305, the absence of any one-to-one relationship between latent dream-thoughts and manifest dream-content is expressed in the following terms:

...the elements which stand out as the principal components of the manifest content of the dream are far from playing the same part in the dream-thoughts. And, as a corollary, the converse of this assertion can be affirmed: what is clearly the essence of the dream-thoughts need not be represented in the... [manifest content of] the dream at all.

²⁴² Ibid.

condensation and displacement is evident in Freud's assessment that the dream-work involves the functioning of a psychical force

...which on the one hand strips the elements which have a high psychical value of their intensity, and on the other hand, *by means of overdetermination*, creates from elements of low psychical value new values, which afterwards find their way into the dream-content. If that is so, a *transference and displacement of psychical intensities* occurs in the process of dream-formation, and it is as a result of these that the difference between the text of the dream-content and that of the dream-thoughts comes about.²⁴³

It may be recalled that, in 'The Unconscious', Freud states that condensation and displacement are 'distinguishing marks' of the 'primary process' (i.e., that which functions in the system *Ucs.*). However, in 'The Interpretation of Dreams', Freud specifically identifies the 'psychical force' that 'manifests itself in the facts of dream-displacement' with 'the censorship which is exercised by one psychical agency in the mind over another'²⁴⁴ – i.e., the mediation of the *Ucs.* by the *Pcs.* Notwithstanding the evident ambiguity, it is apparent that, in 'The Interpretation of Dreams', Freud, precisely, invokes condensation and displacement to explain the difference between the latent dream-thoughts and the manifest dream-content – i.e., the difference between that which is, strictly speaking, of the system *Ucs.* and that which, by virtue of the system *Pcs.*, is subsequently able to become part of the conscious discourse of a dream analysis. This is simply to reiterate that, in accordance with the secondary process, effects of the primary processes of condensation and displacement can register in consciousness. Moreover, as previously noted, the effects of condensation and displacement register simultaneously. In section 2.4, this simultaneity will be similarly observed in the operation of metaphor and metonymy such that, in consciousness, always already it is the case that agent-like, metaphoric irruptions are encountered *as* sutured into a prevailing, metonymic automatism. In other words, each metaphoric irruption 'produces' (or, better perhaps, 'is structurally synonymous with') a metonymic displacement. The metaphoric function will be characterised as that which enables the production of new meaning. The metonymic

²⁴³ Ibid, 307-08.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 308.

function will be characterised as that which preserves existing meaning and thus sustains the appearance of an enduring, intersubjective, social and cultural reality.

2.3 Meaning-in-the-making: the signifier and the signifying chain; meaning repression/overdetermination

2.3.1 Sign, signifier, signified: Lacan's subversion of Saussure's linguistics

In the remainder of this chapter, I explore the implications of Lacan's linguistic transformation of Freudian theory in order to illuminate the following propositions: (1) expressions of subjectivity or meaning-making evince a tension between consciousness and the unconscious, (2) the tension between consciousness and the unconscious admits equivalent interpretation as a tension between *one's meaning* and *an other meaning*, (3) in consequence, subjectivity demands to be understood in terms of a paradoxical simultaneity of agency and automatism. This discussion will fall into two main areas. In the current section, I present a Lacanian conception of the *structure* by virtue of which, in language, meaning emerges. That is, the field of the linguistic sign or, to be more precise, the *signifier* and *signifying chain*. In keeping with the structuralist or Saussurean impetus of Lacanian theory, I take the signifier/signifying chain to be defined by the relationship of tension obtaining between a *conscious* field of *meaning/forms* and an *unconscious* field of *potentials*. Briefly, I summarise Lacan's understanding of how this structure is articulated in terms of a psychical function of *repression/overdetermination*. In section 2.4, I address Lacan's conception of *metaphor* and *metonymy* as exemplars of the structural *laws* according to which, in the making of meaning, signs are governed – that is to say, in accordance with the terminology proposed in section 2.2, the metaphoric *structuring* of a metonymic *structure*. This aspect of the discussion highlights the equivalence between the psychical function of repression/overdetermination, and the counterpoise of metaphor and metonymy implicated in the production of what Lacan refers to as *points de capiton*.

As a preliminary to the following discussion, it may be useful to specify how this study understands the distinctions obtaining between *signs*, *signifieds*, and *signifiers*. This

clarification seems necessary given that these terms are subject to various ambiguities – both in Lacan’s writing, and in the literature generally. In the first place, then, and in accordance with the function of representation/symbolisation, *signs* are to be considered as meaning/forms that are apprehended *in* and *as* conscious experience. That is to say, consciousness simply *is* sensing/thinking *signs*. Secondly, *signifieds* are to be understood as the meanings *of* signs or, to be more precise, meanings emerging by virtue of *relations between* signs established through conscious acts of naming or identification (where, always already, relations between signs are, themselves, signs). In other words, meaning does not subsist in isolation from signs nor do signs signify in and of themselves. On the contrary, *the* meaning one consciously determines defines a relation of tension with a *field* of meaning/forms (equivalent to what Lacan terms the big Other, symbolic order, or signifying chain), the greater part of which is, practically speaking, repressed and, therefore, unconscious.

At this point, by way of anticipating the discussion in this and later chapters, it may be useful to elaborate this understanding of the signified (which is to say, meaning and the manner of its emergence) in greater detail. In the first place, then, it is proposed that the signified emerges in consciousness by virtue of a *relation of identity* established between signs of the form $A = B$ (such that, for example, in accordance with Jakobson’s linguistics, A and B may be metaphorically substituted for one another). Furthermore, in accordance with Jakobson’s understanding of the metonymic ‘combination’ and ‘texture’ of signs, always already, identities between signs are, themselves, signs – the meaning of which obtains (in a wider context, so to speak) by virtue of further relations of identity established with other signs. Thus, the identity $A = B$ is, itself, a sign ($[A = B]$, say), the meaning of which emerges by virtue of further identities such as $[A = B] = C$. Let us qualify these formulae in anticipation of the discussion in chapters three and four. Let A = ‘*Victory over Death 2*’, let B = ‘major painted calligraphy AM I AM’, and let C = ‘McCahon’s written paintings of 1969 and 1970’. On this basis, $A = B$ expresses the identity ‘*Victory over Death 2* is the painting distinguished by its inclusion of the major, painted calligraphy AM I AM’, $A = C$ expresses the identity ‘*Victory over Death 2* is the painting distinguished by its membership of McCahon’s written paintings of 1969 and

1970', and $[A = B] = C$ expresses the identity '[*Victory over Death 2*, the painting distinguished by its inclusion of the major, painted calligraphy AM I AM,] is distinguished by its membership of McCahon's written paintings of 1969 and 1970'. Similarly, let $A =$ '*Painting from "Malady"*', let $B =$ 'sanguineous annulus', and let $C =$ 'Hotere's *Malady* series paintings of 1970'. From this perspective, $A = B$ expresses the identity '*Painting from "Malady"* is the painting distinguished by its inclusion of a sanguineous annulus', $A = C$ expresses the identity '*Painting from "Malady"* is the painting distinguished by its membership of Hotere's *Malady* series paintings of 1970', and $[A = B] = C$ expresses the identity '[*Painting from "Malady"*, the painting distinguished by its inclusion of a sanguineous annulus,] is distinguished by its membership of Hotere's *Malady* series paintings of 1970'.

Still further, however, it is necessary to understand that conceiving of 'the' meaning emerging by virtue of 'an' identity of the form $A = B$ is valid only as a first approximation. Two aspects of this approximation demand more precise elaboration: (1) the notion that meaning emerges by virtue of a relation of identity and (2) the notion that meaning may be conceived in the singular (i.e., as 'a' meaning or 'a' signified). With regard to the first point (and as the discussion in subsection 2.3.3 illustrates), in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, the so-called tension between consciousness and the unconscious is considered to be synonymous with a psychical function of repression/overdetermination of meaning. From this perspective, 'the' signified, emerging in consciousness by virtue of an *identity* of the form $A = B$ is, at the same time, sustained on the basis of a forgetting, suppressing, or *repressing* of the *difference* between A and B , or $A \neq B$. To anticipate matters for further discussion in chapter three, insofar as, always already, this unconscious, repressed difference is insisting or returning (i.e., as that which, for the sake of argument, will be referred to as an 'identity-in-difference' of the form A/B), the identity $A = B$ unravels or, to employ Lacan's terminology, 'fades' – which is to say that the signified or meaning evinces ambiguity.

Here, it should be noted that, notwithstanding the inevitability of consciously representing/symbolising the difference between A and B or, indeed, the

repressed/returning identity-in-difference, *as signs* (i.e., $[A \neq B]$ and $[A/B]$, respectively), strictly speaking, these are neither entities nor expressions of such and, indeed, fundamentally exceed and elude determination in language. That is to say, ‘in themselves’, $[A \neq B]$ and $[A/B]$ are, quite literally, *inconceivable*. To anticipate matters for further discussion in chapter three, it may be suggested that the ‘pure’ or ‘absolute’ difference between A and B attests to a *function* of pure difference or a *lettering/tracing/differencing* synonymous with the function of psychical repression/overdetermination of meaning. To the extent that this pure difference or lettering/tracing/differencing is impossible to represent/symbolise, it demands to be thought as a function of what will be termed the ‘real-as-impossibility, synonymous with, yet inassimilable to, the function of representation/symbolisation’.

Secondly, to reiterate the point made above, always already, *the* meaning one consciously determines defines a tension with a *field* of meaning (equivalent to what Lacan terms the big Other, symbolic order, signifying chain), the greater part of which is, practically speaking, repressed and, therefore, unconscious. Indeed, if one applies with rigour the implications of Lacanian theory then the very idea of determining ‘a’ meaning, in the singular, would appear to be precisely that which defines consciousness as a domain of imaginary idealisations and rationalisations of meaning. Therefore, to be more precise in one’s terminology, one ought to say that, in consciousness, one sustains an imaginary ideal of ‘a’ determined and enduring meaning by virtue of the repression of an infinity of differences. Insofar as, always already, this repressed infinity of differences is returning, ‘the’ meaning one sustains in consciousness is sustained *only in its ambiguity*. To anticipate matters for discussion in chapter four, I seek to explain this ambiguity in terms of meaning that *is as reiterated* (i.e., presenting as necessary, inevitable, normal, and natural) *and is as fading* (i.e., becoming ambiguous).

As a final, preliminary observation regarding the distinctions obtaining between *signs*, *signifieds*, and *signifiers*, it is worth noting that, in Lacan’s writing and elsewhere, one often finds signs and *signifiers* referred to interchangeably – something admissible as a first approximation or a convenient shorthand. Up to a point, then, the signifier invites

interpretation as the conscious apprehension of a meaning/form (or a field of meaning/forms) – albeit, apart from any particular meaning. However, it is also important to appreciate that, from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the manner by which the signifier means apart from any particular meaning is precisely that which defines the *tension* obtaining between consciousness and the unconscious. From this standpoint, the signifier demands a more rigorous definition as a function of ‘pure difference’, producing a field of differences that constitute what may be termed a ‘trace structure’. Thus conceived, the signifier resonates with the Lacanian understanding of *das Ding* in terms of a ‘structuring of structure’. These matters will merit further elaboration in chapter three. In the present context, the instrumental point is that ‘the’ signifier fundamentally exceeds and eludes conscious determination as either a ‘positive entity’ or a ‘being present’. Strictly speaking, then, *in consciousness*, it is not ‘the’ signifier *per se* that is apprehended or determined so much as ‘its’ *effects*. These effects are registered as discontinuities or symptomatic disturbances in a field of differences (i.e., the signifier conceived *negatively* as nothing other than the differences between signifiers) that is *positively* determined *as* a field of different things (i.e., objects or, rather, signs).

In *Seminar III*, this conception of the signifier as nothing but a sign of the relations of difference obtaining between signifiers is evident from Lacan’s discussion of the distinction between signifiers and material traces. Lacan points out that a material trace (like a footprint in the sand, for example) is a sign that refers to an absent object. However,

...the signifier is a sign that doesn’t refer to any object, not even to one in the form of a trace, even though the trace nevertheless heralds the signifier’s essential feature. It, too, is the sign of an absence. But insofar as it forms part of language, the signifier is a sign which refers to another sign, which is as such structured to signify the absence of another sign, in other words, to be opposed to it in a couple.²⁴⁵

Lewis reiterates this point with particular clarity:

²⁴⁵ Lacan, *Seminar III*, 167.

Signifiers as such are nothing besides their references to other signifiers. This means that signifiers are nothing besides the differences *between* signifiers. Each signifier is composed of traces which mark the absence of *other* signifiers.²⁴⁶

Still further, Lacan characterises the ‘existence of signifiers *as such*’ (my italics) as ‘a complex relationship of totality to totality... of entire system to entire system, of universe of signifiers to universe of signifiers.’²⁴⁷ That is to say, signifiers must be conceived as *nothing apart from* the ‘complex relationship... of universe of signifiers to universe of signifiers.’ In other words, all references to *the* signifier as *a* meaning/form or potential (i.e., in the *singular*), whilst inviting one to entertain the prospect of the actual or potential materialisation of an entity, must be considered as a discursive shorthand for the infinity of differential relations that constitutes the ‘universe of signifiers’. Always already, then, ‘the’ signifier is a ‘universe’ of such.

Support for this interpretation may be found across the breadth of Lacan’s *Seminar*. In *Seminar I*, for example, Lacan observes:

The symbolic system is extraordinarily intricate, marked as it is by this *Verschlungenheit*, *property of criss-crossing*... *Verschlungenheit* designates linguistic criss-crossing – every easily isolable linguistic symbol is not only at one with the totality, but is cut across and constituted by a series of overflowings, of oppositional overdeterminations which place it at one and the same time in several registers.²⁴⁸

Similarly, in *Seminar II*, Lacan affirms that the ‘domain proper to the human order’ is a ‘symbolic’ ‘totality’ or ‘universe’. Moreover, this totality ‘isn’t constituted bit by bit. As soon as the symbol arrives, there is a universe of symbols.’ Although, here, Lacan allows that, practically speaking, it remains to be seen ‘how many symbols... constitute the

²⁴⁶ Lewis, 24.

²⁴⁷ Lacan, *Seminar III*, 119.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, *Seminar I*, 53-54.

symbolic universe', *in potentia*, this number is clearly infinite.²⁴⁹ Still further, in *Seminar XX*, one finds the rhetorical question:

Does the signifier "One" derive from the fact that a signifier as such is never anything but *one-among-others*, referred to those others, being but its difference from the others?

In response to which, Lacan asks 'What does "There's such a thing as One" mean?' and, answering his own question, 'From the *one-among-others*... arises... a signifying swarm'. On this basis, Lacan concludes:

The signifier "one" is not just any old signifier. It is the signifying order insofar as it is instituted on the basis of the envelopment by which the whole of the chain subsists.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Ibid, *Seminar II*, 29.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, *Seminar XX*, 143.

By way of anticipating the discussion presented in chapter three, this understanding of 'the' signifier as a 'universe' of such is complicated by assertions made in *ibid*, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 4, 6 December 1961, 32. Here, Lacan defines the 'essence of the signifier' as the 'unary trait'. However, it is important to appreciate that this 'essence of the signifier' is neither simply nor immediately a metaphysical entity or an expression of such. On the contrary, Lacan describes the signifier, in its 'essence' as a 'one as difference' or a function of 'pure difference'.

In this regard, I should acknowledge that the difference between the 'essence of the signifier' as the 'unary trait' and 'the' signifier that is, always already, a 'universe' of signifiers resonates with definitions presented in Evers. Here, Evers proposes a 'novel typology of the "signifier-in-isolation" and the "signifier-in-relation"', where

The 'signifier-in-isolation' designates the signifier as it exists as a material mark, isolated from networks of relational meaning. The 'signifier-in-relation', by contrast, designates the signifier in its better-known state, differentially related to all other signifiers and productive of meaning, as insisted upon in Saussure's structural linguistics. (5)

Evers emphasises that these are 'potential "states" for *any* signifier, rather than... different signifiers or fundamentally different modalities of signification.' By way of further elaborating the notion of the signifier-in-isolation, Evers defines it as the 'Real-in-the-Symbolic' and associates it with various Lacanian terms such as the ' "letter", "unary trait", "phallic signifier", "empty signifier" ' (38). Evers' reference to the 'materiality' of the signifier will merit further discussion in chapter three.

Having established the complex nature of ‘the’ signifier, we may now turn to Lacan’s conception of ‘it’ as the primary structural element implicated in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making. This may be illustrated by considering the implications of his so-called ‘subversion’ or ‘destruction’ of the Saussurean sign – a process by which Lacan amplifies or exploits certain ambiguities in Saussure’s linguistics.²⁵¹ What are these? In the first place, Saussure’s conception of the linguistic sign seems paradoxical insofar as it is posited as a ‘concrete’ psychical or psychological ‘entity’ or ‘reality’ that, nevertheless, resists precise determination. Secondly, on the basis of this ambiguity, there is engendered, in Saussure’s linguistics, a further tension between the sign, considered ‘positively’, as an *identity* of signified and signifier, and the degree to which, on closer inspection, identities of this kind appear only as *potentials* enlivened within language conceived, ‘negatively’ or *diacritically*, as a ‘system of pure values’ or *relations of difference*.²⁵²

Thus, in ‘The Instance of the Letter’, Lacan, firstly, elides, from the Saussurean sign, its bounding oval and reciprocating side arrows – diagrammatic features that, in the *Cours*, would appear to reinforce the status of the sign as a genuinely ‘real’ and ‘concrete’ (albeit, *psychical*) self-sufficiency or totality in which there obtains (to paraphrase Saussure) an ‘intimate unity’ or identity of signified (concept or meaning) and signifier (sound-image or phenomenal representation).²⁵³ Indeed, Lacan refers to his re-writing of the Saussurean sign as an ‘algorithm’ or ‘formalization’ – thus emphasising its status as an abstraction or idealisation.²⁵⁴ Secondly, Lacan repudiates Saussure’s posited

²⁵¹ A particularly detailed exegesis of Lacan’s ‘subversion’ or ‘destruction’ of the Saussurean sign is given in Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Title of the Letter, A Reading of Lacan*, trans François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York, 1992, originally published as *Le titre de la lettre* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1973)), 33-50. See, also, Chiesa, 48-49, Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 80-81, and Evans, 183-84.

²⁵² Here, I acknowledge that I am presenting a highly condensed summation of Saussure’s linguistics. See section 8.6 for a more in-depth account of the implications of Saussure’s conception of the linguistic sign and linguistic value.

²⁵³ Saussure, 66.

²⁵⁴ Lacan, ‘The Instance of the Letter’, 414-15.

bi-univocal relation between signified and signifier. Hence, in *Seminar III*, Lacan asserts that ‘the relationship between signifier and signified is far from being... one-to-one.’²⁵⁵ Similarly, in ‘The Instance of the Letter’, Lacan insists on rejecting ‘the illusion that the signifier serves [*répond à*] the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to justify [*répondre de*] its existence in terms of any signification whatsoever.’²⁵⁶ Here, the liberation of the signifier from its purely representative or auxiliary function in relation to the signified amplifies what is, already, more or less acknowledged in Saussure’s linguistics: the sign – in principle, an identity that offers to express a determinate meaning – nevertheless resists absolute delimitation or determination. In other words, the sign is revealed, ultimately, to be an *ideal* of meaning rather than an objectively *real* expression of meaning. In *Seminar III*, the conception of meaning as both ideal and unstable would appear to underpin comments like ‘meaning is by nature imaginary... always in the end evanescent’ and ‘The relationship between the signified and the signifier always appears fluid, always ready to come undone.’²⁵⁷ Thirdly, in keeping with his understanding that the absolute determination of meaning is an unrealisable or unsustainable ideal, Lacan turns the Saussurean sign on its head, insisting on the priority of the signifier over the signified. Consequently, in ‘The Instance of the Letter’, Lacan (1) explicitly presents what he terms the ‘algorithm that grounds... linguistics’ as ‘S/s... signifier over signified’, (2) redefines the Saussurean line of unity between signified and signifier as a ‘barrier resisting signification’, and (3) links the construction S/s to the ‘topography’ of the unconscious such that ‘f(S) 1/s’.²⁵⁸ In relation to this latter point, Bruce Fink interprets Lacan’s formula as ‘ “The signified (*s*) is a function of the signifier (S).” ’²⁵⁹ Support for Fink’s reading may be found in *Seminar III*, where Lacan contends:

²⁵⁵ Ibid, *Seminar III*, 119.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, ‘The Instance of the Letter’, 416.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, *Seminar III*, 54, 261.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, ‘The Instance of the Letter’, 414-15, 428-29.

²⁵⁹ Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 98-99.

The signifier doesn't just provide an envelope, a receptacle for meaning. It polarizes it, structures it, and brings it into existence.²⁶⁰

2.3.2 Meaning/forms and meaning *in potentia*: the signifier and the signifying chain

In chapter one, I suggested that, from a Lacanian perspective, expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making define a tension between the individual and a *transindividual Otherness*. As previously stated, this transindividual Otherness is synonymous with what Lacan calls, variously, the big Other, symbolic order, or signifying chain – the greater part of which is, practically speaking (i.e., from the perspective of the conscious individual), repressed and, therefore, unconscious. In the present chapter, I have suggested, additionally, that, (1) in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, the tension between consciousness and the unconscious manifests in symptomatic disturbances, (2) symptomatic disturbances admit consideration as effects of the signifier, and (3) always already, 'the' signifier is a 'universe' of such. Reconciling these propositions, it may be suggested that (1) the 'universe' of 'the' signifier corresponds to the signifying chain, (2) symptomatic disturbances define a tension between the individual one that is conscious and a (mostly) repressed transindividual Otherness, and (3) symptomatic disturbances also define a tension between conscious and unconscious dimensions of the signifying chain.

It may be noted that the signifying chain is another concept Lacan appropriates from Saussure's linguistics. In so doing, Lacanian theory reflects Saussure's understanding of discourse as a structure of *syntagmatic* and *associative* relations.²⁶¹ Thus, in the *Cours*, Saussure defines syntagmatic relations as the linear combination of 'elements... arranged

²⁶⁰ Lacan, *Seminar III*, 260.

²⁶¹ For references to the Saussurean conception of language in terms of a chain of signs wherein meaning emerges diacritically see, for example, the discussion on the delimiting of linguistic signs and the notion of linguistic value in Saussure, 103-07, 111-20. For further illumination of how Lacan conceives of the signifying chain in Saussurean terms, see Evans, 188.

in sequence on the chain of speaking', in accordance with rules of grammar and syntax, and which, thereby, obtain *in* discourse. By contrast, associative relations obtain *outside* discourse insofar as they define the 'host of other words', whose 'seat is in the brain', that a particular utterance will 'unconsciously call to mind' from the 'inner storehouse that makes up the language of each speaker.' In consequence, Saussure asserts: 'The syntagmatic relation is *in praesentia*. It is based on two or more terms that occur in an effective series. Against this, the associative relation unites terms *in absentia* in a potential mnemonic series.'²⁶² On this basis, Saussure goes on to suggest that 'A particular word is like the center of a constellation; it is the point of convergence of an indefinite number of co-ordinated terms'.²⁶³

Evidently, then, the conscious dimension of the Lacanian signifying chain is equivalent to the Saussurean sequence of syntagms. Analogously, the unconscious dimension of the Lacanian signifying chain corresponds to the Saussurean constellation of associations that each syntagm expressed in consciousness 'unconsciously call[s] to mind'. In 'The Instance of the Letter', this understanding is implicit in Lacan's characterisation of the 'chain of discourse' as a 'horizontal axis... in the direction in which it is oriented in time', along which resounds a 'polyphony... aligned along the several staves of a musical score', and his suggestion that 'Indeed, there is no signifying chain that does not sustain – as if attached to the punctuation of each of its units – all attested contexts that are, so to speak, “vertically” linked to that point'.²⁶⁴ The unconscious aspect of the signifying chain also seems implicit in Lacan's allusion to the 'synchronic system of differential couplings... necessary to discern vocables in a given language [*langue*]' and his explicit illustration of the '“signifying chain”' with reference

²⁶² Saussure, 123.

²⁶³ Ibid, 126.

²⁶⁴ Lacan, 'The Instance of the Letter', 419. For a particularly clear illustration of Lacan's conception of discourse as a 'polyphony... aligned along the several staves of a musical score' see Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 90-91.

to the ‘links by which a necklace firmly hooks onto a link of another necklace made of links.’²⁶⁵

However, in saying this, it is important to distinguish between Saussurean and Lacanian conceptions of the unconscious. In effect, Saussure conceives of the unconscious as an ‘inner storehouse’ of pre-fabricated signs by which language subsists in the memory of an individual. Lacan repudiates this understanding in two crucial respects. Firstly, Lacanian theory proposes that the unconscious is not *simply language* but rather *structured like a language*. Secondly, Lacanian theory rejects the notion that the unconscious is a function of individual memory. Thus in the ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter”’, Lacan asserts that ‘the remembering [*mémoration*] at stake in the unconscious – and I mean the Freudian unconscious – is not related to the register that is assumed to be that of memory, insofar as memory is taken to be a property of a living being.’²⁶⁶ Similarly, in ‘Position of the Unconscious’, Lacan tacitly denies that the unconscious is equivalent to ‘the learned and even integrated reserves of memory’.²⁶⁷

This said, the Lacanian unconscious *does* reflect the Saussurean understanding that ‘the associative relation unites terms *in absentia* in a potential mnemonic series’. That is to say, as previously suggested, the Lacanian unconscious admits consideration as a field of pure potentials *per se*. Support for this idea may be found in *Seminar III* where, for example, Lacan observes:

If we admit the existence of the unconscious as Freud elaborates it, we have to suppose that this sentence, this symbolic construction, covers all human lived experience like a web, that it’s always there, more or less *latent*... [my italics]²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Lacan, ‘The Instance of the Letter’ 418-19.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter”’, 31.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, ‘Position of the Unconscious’, 704.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, *Seminar III*, 112.

That the unconscious is the field of latent or potential forms of meaning is also implicit in Lacan's appeal to the Freudian notion of '*overdetermination*' in characterising the 'conflict' or meaning ambiguity underlying symptomatic expressions.²⁶⁹ It is on this basis that, as noted earlier, Lacan proposes: 'symptoms... are always based on the existence of signifiers as such, on a complex relationship of totality to totality... of entire system to entire system, of universe of signifiers to universe of signifiers.' Hence, in conscious expressions of subjectivity, symptoms manifest when

The material linked to... [an] old conflict is preserved in the unconscious as a *potential* signifier, as a *virtual* signifier, and then captured in the signified of the current conflict and used by it as language' [my italics].²⁷⁰

In proposing symptoms to be equivalent to the 'capture in the signified' of 'a potential signifier... preserved in the unconscious', it should be clear that this signifier, *qua potential*, neither exists as a positive entity nor designates any determinate meaning. Considered as effects of 'the' signifier that is a 'universe' of signifiers, symptoms may be said to define the tension obtaining between (1) that which, *in consciousness*, is 'actually' apprehended or determined (i.e., a field of signs or meaning/forms), in relation to which particular meanings emerge (i.e., signifieds), and (2) an infinite field of *potentials* that is synonymous with the unconscious.²⁷¹ More concisely (albeit, with some loss of rigour), the Lacanian conception of the signifier may be said to define the tension obtaining between its *conscious* aspect as a *meaning/form* and its *unconscious* aspect as a *potential*. Further supporting the idea that the Lacanian unconscious is conceivable in terms of potentials is, for example, Ragland-Sullivan's observation that

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 119.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 119-120.

²⁷¹ It may be noted that the understanding of the Lacanian unconscious as a field of pure potentials again resonates with aspects of Heideggerian philosophy. Relevant, in this regard, is Heidegger's definition of *Dasein* in terms of potentials and possibilities, and his conception of the temporality of *Dasein* in terms of *ekstasis*. These matters merit further discussion in section 8.2.

...we can sum up the Lacanian unconscious as a structural (ordered), signifying (meaningful) delimitation of conscious thought and behavior, made up of all that one is, as well as of the potential for what one may become... What any analysis of an unconscious will reveal is a nonsubstantial, dialectical 'language' of becoming...²⁷²

Also relevant, in this regard, is Lorenzo Chiesa's suggestion that

...according to Lacan, the unconscious can be considered as a 'potential' signified... Unconscious meaning is therefore nothing but signification *in potentia*.²⁷³

2.3.3 The psychological function of meaning repression/overdetermination

Having presented a Lacanian conception of the signifier in terms of (1) a negative structure of relations of difference wherein, always already, 'the' signifier is a 'universe' of such, and (2) the relationship of tension obtaining between its *conscious* aspect as a *meaning/form* and its *unconscious* aspect as a *potential*, it is now possible to specify how, in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, the signifier is articulated in accordance with a psychological function of repression/overdetermination. In this regard, Lewis provides a particularly lucid summary. In the first place, Lewis affirms that a signifier encountered in consciousness (e.g., in the form of a spoken or written sign) means by virtue of its reference to the field of signifiers that '*in their infinity* constitute the unconscious.'²⁷⁴ However, as Lewis relates, further, it is necessary to efface this infinity of differences 'in

²⁷² Ragland-Sullivan, 110.

²⁷³ Chiesa, 54. In relation to Chiesa's observation, I would suggest that, as a matter of convenience, one may refer to the potentials that are unconscious *either* as potential meanings (i.e., potential signifieds) *or* potential meaning/forms (i.e., potential signifiers). However, if one is to be entirely rigorous in one's attributions then one ought to appreciate that unconscious potentials elude and exceed any kind of determination in terms of entities or things. Strictly speaking, then, one cannot specify the potentials that are unconscious as anything other *than potentials*. Always already, to speak of potential meanings and/or meaning/forms that are unconscious is to retrospectively project onto the hypothesis that is the unconscious that which is, necessarily, apprehended and thought *in* and *as consciousness*. For this reason, Chiesa's terminology is, perhaps, better taken figuratively, as opposed to literally.

²⁷⁴ Lewis, 24.

order to render present to consciousness the *signified* of the signifiers one is using... What is elided in consciousness is thus the signifier as such, in favour of the signified.’ Indeed, Lewis observes that ‘It is the elision of this infinity of differences which *constitutes* repression.’²⁷⁵ From the perspective of finite consciousness (i.e., the perspective of the ego), meaning-making demands that the infinity of differences, characteristic of the field of signifiers, be repressed in favour of an imaginary idealisation of meaning – a meaning that, on the basis of an idealisation of this kind, can be particular, determinate and present to *one* (where this ‘one’ or ego is, itself, an imaginary ideal of self-unity, self-presence and self-sufficiency).

However, because the conscious determination of meaning is, precisely, an imaginary idealisation, the infinite field of differences, constitutive of signifiers that are unconscious, is not simply negated. On the contrary, a fundamental hypothesis of Lacanian psychoanalysis is that disturbances in meaning-making (i.e., *symptoms*), whilst registered entirely in consciousness, may be attributed to the continuing insistence of a repressed field of potentials that are unconscious. Consequently, as Lacan asserts in *Seminar II*, ‘The discovery of the unconscious... is that the full significance of meaning far surpasses the signs manipulated by the individual’ (i.e., ‘one that is conscious’). Hence: ‘Man is always cultivating a great many more signs than he thinks.’²⁷⁶ Acknowledging Lacan’s claim, Lewis appropriates Freud’s terminology and identifies this overabundance of meaning as ‘a signified’s “overdetermination” by signifiers. There is always more than one thing that a signifier could signify’ – on which basis, ambiguity of meaning is, therefore, inherent to the signifier.²⁷⁷ As Lewis relates, further, ‘It is by means of this overdetermination that the repressed can *return*, that the unconscious can make its *absence felt* within language.’ This is, precisely, what is inherent in symptoms such as parapraxes and other discontinuities in meaning-making. The signifier as ‘linguistic overdetermination of meaning... becomes manifest *in* its very repression.’ In

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 25.

²⁷⁶ Lacan, *Seminar II*, 122.

²⁷⁷ Lewis, 25.

making this suggestion, Lewis affirms that the signifier, in its unconscious aspect, is not conceivable as a metaphysical entity or expression of such:

It is not as if the unconscious reveals itself; rather it is revealed that there *is* an unconscious. The repressed returns in the symptom, but it returns as repressed... What returns is not *that* which is repressed, but the very event of repression itself...²⁷⁸

In support of this idea, Lewis refers to *Seminar III*, where Lacan asserts:

What comes under the effect of repression returns, for repression and the return of the repressed are just the two sides of the same coin. The repressed is always there, expressed in a perfectly articulate manner in symptoms and a host of other phenomena.²⁷⁹

Let us summarise the discussion thus far. What is being proposed is that, in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, the tension between consciousness and the unconscious admits consideration in terms of the expression, articulation or structuring of the signifying chain in its conscious and its unconscious aspects. The conscious dimension of the signifying chain comprises a diachronic sequence of signifiers-as-meaning/forms. The unconscious dimension of the signifying chain comprises a synchronic constellation of signifiers that, to employ Chiesa's parlance, exists or, rather, insists, '*in potentia*'. The connexion between the conscious and the unconscious dimensions of the signifying chain is articulated in accordance with a psychical 'mechanism' or 'function' that *represses* signifiers (i.e., expels signifiers from consciousness and reifies the infinite field of potential signifiers that are unconscious) and, at the same time, by virtue of the 'return' of these repressed signifiers, *over-determines* signifieds in consciousness. These signifieds are, ostensibly, determinate meanings that, in the final analysis, are revealed to be indeterminate and ideal. Moreover, an important consequence of the psychical phenomenon of repression/overdetermination is that, in language-mediated expressions of subjectivity, discontinuities in meaning-

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 26.

²⁷⁹ Lacan, *Seminar III*, 12.

making do not evince a *lack* or *absence* of meaning but, on the contrary, testify to an *overabundance* of meaning – at least, *in potentia*. Hence, in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, the tension between consciousness and the unconscious admits interpretation as a tension between *one meaning* and *an other meaning* in the sense that any signified emerging is not merely determined but, always already, *overdetermined* and thus susceptible to being replaced and re-written. Indeed, the notion of meaning overdetermination would appear to imply that signifieds are not merely vulnerable to being overwritten – rather, always already it is the case that this is taking place.

This latter conclusion simply reiterates Lacan's insistence that 'meaning is by nature imaginary... always in the end evanescent' – i.e., the manner by which the signified, as an ideal of meaning, as a product of fabrication and rationalisation, legislates only contingently rather than absolutely. The sense *one* has that meaning *is* both articulated and effective is, precisely, the illusion of consciousness and ego. Nevertheless, even if this state of affairs obtains, it still seems necessary to explain in greater detail the apparent prevalence and persistence of these illusions. That is to say, *how is it* that there is the appearance of an entrenched panoply of longstanding cultural mores and prejudices permeating and structuring every human endeavour? *How is it* that there is the appearance of an intersubjective, social and cultural reality, wherein meaning emerges and endures long enough to be communicated? In the following section, I seek a preliminary unravelling of these conundrums by appealing to Lacan's understanding of the laws of metaphor and metonymy, in relation to which the field of meaning is configured by *points de capiton*.

2.4 The meaning that is made: metaphor, metonymy and the *point de capiton*

2.4.1 Metaphors and metonyms

In *Seminar III* and ‘The Instance of the Letter’, Lacan’s elaboration of the functioning of the signifying chain in terms of *metonymy* and *metaphor* explicitly refers to Jakobson’s essay ‘Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances’.²⁸⁰ Here, it may be useful to recall that Jakobson’s account of metonymy and metaphor is, in essence, a reframing of Saussure’s understanding of discourse in terms of syntagmatic and associative relations. Thus, Jakobson attributes to the linguistic sign ‘two modes of arrangement’, which he terms ‘Combination’ and ‘Selection’, and which, he acknowledges, are analogous to the relations Saussure understood as holding, respectively, ‘*in presentia*’ (i.e., syntagms) and ‘*in absentia*’ (i.e., associations). Combination implies that ‘Any sign is made up of constituent signs and only occurs in combination with other signs’, between which there obtain relations of ‘contiguity’. Selection implies ‘the possibility of substituting one... [sign] for the other, equivalent to the former in one respect and different from it in another’, on which basis ‘signs are linked by various degrees of similarity’ – that is to say, relations of similarity *and* difference.²⁸¹ Jakobson goes on to elaborate two forms of aphasia wherein, respectively, relations of similarity and relations of contiguity are ‘suppressed’, thereby positing that ‘Metaphor is alien to the similarity disorder, and metonymy to the contiguity disorder.’²⁸²

I would argue that Lacan’s allusions to metaphor and metonymy are potentially confusing unless one distinguishes between their application as (1) *literary figures* (i.e.,

²⁸⁰ For references to Lacan’s employment of the tropes of metaphor and metonymy, and his acknowledgement of Jakobson’s essay, see *ibid*, *Seminar III*, 218-21, 219 (n7), 222-30, and *ibid*, ‘The Instance of the Letter’, 421-23, 428-30, 439 (n5).

²⁸¹ Jakobson, ‘Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances’, 60-61.

²⁸² *Ibid*, 63-75, 76.

metonyms and metaphors that are, necessarily, encountered *in consciousness*) and (2) *structural laws or operators* (i.e., the metonymic relationships of combination/contiguity and the metaphoric relationships of selection/substitution that define the tension obtaining between conscious and unconscious dimensions of the signifying chain). This distinction may be illustrated with reference to Lacan's employment of the two phrases 'thirty sails' and 'love is a pebble laughing in the sun'.²⁸³ Structurally speaking, *relations* of metonymy and metaphor obtain in *both* expressions. Metonymic relationships obtain insofar as each phrase chains two or more words in series. Metaphoric relationships obtain insofar as each phrase involves substitutions. In the first example, 'sail' is substituted for 'ship'; in the second example, 'a pebble laughing in the sun' is substituted for 'love'. In the literary or poetical sense, however, 'thirty sails' is a metonym whilst 'love is a pebble laughing in the sun' is a metaphor. As Lacan points out, this distinction reflects the fact that, in the former case, 'The part is taken for the whole' (i.e., the figure of synecdoche, which is often considered to be a form of metonymy) whilst, in the latter, there is a stating of '*One word for another*'.²⁸⁴ Consequently, the metonym 'thirty sails' expresses an already extant relation between 'sail' and 'ship' such that the expression 'thirty sails' is equivalent to 'thirty ships' – i.e., they *mean the same*. This is precisely to say that no *new* meaning is produced or, as Lacan puts it, there is a 'resistance of signification'. Contrarily, in the metaphor 'love is a pebble laughing in the sun', no pre-existing relation obtains between 'love' and 'a pebble laughing in the sun'. On this basis, it is apparent that, in substituting one for the other, new meaning *is* created or, in Lacan's words, there is 'emergence of signification'.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ For Lacan's reference to 'thirty sails' see Lacan, 'The Instance of the Letter', 421. For Lacan's reference to 'love is a pebble laughing in the sun' see *ibid*, *Seminar III*, 226 and *ibid*, 'The Instance of the Letter', 423.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 'The Instance of the Letter', 421, 422.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 428-29. For further discussion of the distinctions obtaining between metaphor and metonymy see, for example, Grigg, 'Lacan and Jakobson, Metaphor and Metonymy' in *Lacan, Language and Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 151-69.

Having clarified the distinction between *the metaphor* and *the metonym*, considered as literary figures, and *metaphor* and *metonymy*, considered as structural laws or operators, it is now possible to specify, more precisely, how the latter configure the signifying chain in such a way that expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making evince a tension between consciousness and the unconscious. That is to say, the manner by which, in accordance with what may be termed a metaphoric *structuring* of a metonymic *structure*, a synchronic metonymy that is unconscious metaphorically *becomes* as a diachronic metonymy in consciousness. As previously noted, the tension in question reflects Lacan's understanding of the signifying chain as obtaining both in consciousness *and* in the unconscious. On this basis, metonymy defines the combinational ordering of the signifying chain in terms of (1) a diachronic sequence of signifiers-as-meaning/forms in consciousness *and* (2) a synchronic constellation of signifiers-as-potentials that are unconscious. Metaphor, by contrast, can be understood as the operation according to which the emergence of signifieds involves substituting signifiers-as-potentials that are unconscious for signifiers-as-meaning/forms in consciousness. In this way, metaphor would appear to be synonymous with the aforementioned psychical function of repression/overdetermination – by virtue of which meaning-making expresses a relation of tension between consciousness and the unconscious. The meaning ideal that precipitates or crystallises by virtue of this metaphoric structuring of a metonymic structure also corresponds to the production of what Lacan refers to as a *point de capiton*.

2.4.2 The *point de capiton*

Lacan introduces this idea in *Seminar III*, suggesting that the *point de capiton* marks 'the point at which signified and signifier are knotted together'.²⁸⁶ Further elaborations are made in 'The Instance of the Letter', where Lacan (1) refers to the manner by which, in the making of meaning, 'the signifier... enters the signified' and (2) characterises the structure of metaphor as a 'crossing of the bar' between signifier and signified such that

²⁸⁶ Lacan, *Seminar III*, 268.

there is a ‘passage of the signifier into the signified’.²⁸⁷ Finally, in ‘The Subversion of the Subject’, Lacan affirms that ‘metaphor’ corresponds to the ‘hidden... synchronic structure’ of the *point de capiton* (i.e., the constellation of potential signifiers that are unconscious).²⁸⁸ In seeking to understand these characterisations, it is crucial to appreciate that, notwithstanding the seemingly positive and metaphysical inferences of Lacan’s terminology, the wider logic and context of Lacanian theory evidently precludes literally interpreting the *point de capiton* as a localised union of discrete entities. On the contrary, the *point de capiton* must (1) reflect the manner by which signifiers are not to be conceived as positive entities but rather demand to be considered in negative terms as structures of differences (i.e., as a *field* of meaning/forms or potentials), and (2) the status of the signified as contingent and ideal.

The non-metaphysical status of the *point de capiton* also follows from the fact that, insofar as it operates on or configures the signifying chain, it must, by necessity, encompass synchrony *and* diachrony.²⁸⁹ Here, it may be useful to reiterate that, from a *literary* or *poetical* standpoint, the *point de capiton* is a *metaphor* associated with the creation of new meaning (i.e., the emergence or precipitation of a signified – albeit, contingent and ideal). *Structurally speaking*, however, the *point de capiton* possesses a synchronic/metaphoric dimension *and* a diachronic/metonymic dimension. To put the matter equivalently, in conscious discourse, the (structurally synchronic/metaphoric) ‘moment’ of the ‘precipitation’ of meaning is a (structurally diachronic/metonymic) function of both the *anticipation* and *retroactive determination* of meaning. In her essay, ‘Time and Interpretation’ (1996), Colette Soler provides a useful elaboration of the complex temporality proper to expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making. Soler observes that the ‘temporality of the subject’ is neither the abstract temporality of ‘clock

²⁸⁷ Ibid, ‘The Instance of the Letter’, 417, 429.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, ‘The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious’ in *Écrits* (2006) (originally presented as ‘Subversion de sujet et dialectique du désir dans l’inconscient freudien’ at the Royaumont Conference, 19-23 September 1960, and originally published in *Écrits* (1966), 682.

²⁸⁹ For a reference to the idea that the *point de capiton* embraces both synchrony and diachrony, see Evans, 149.

time’ nor the pathologically conditioned temporality of ‘living beings’ but rather ‘the temporality of the signifier’ and ‘signifying chain’, which Soler characterises as ‘reversible time... a twofold temporality between anticipation and retroaction’. As Soler puts it:

...the temporality of speech is a time shared between the anticipation, while you are speaking, of the moment of conclusion (the moment at which you can grasp what you meant), and retroaction, for when you arrive at the anticipated end point, all previous speech takes on new meaning, that is to say, new meaning emerges retroactively.²⁹⁰

Support for Soler’s account of the ‘reversible’ temporality of the subject may be found in *Seminar III*, *Seminar V*, and ‘The Instance of the Letter’. In the former case, Lacan addresses the opening line of Jean Racine’s tragic play *Athaliah* (1691): ‘ “Yes, I come into his temple to worship the Eternal Lord” ’, proposing that, as this phrase unfolds, its ‘meaning’ is inherently ambiguous – floating, as it were, within a mass of unresolved meaning potentials. The possibility of determining *the* meaning of the opening line only crystallises, in hindsight, on its conclusion:

The sentence only exists as completed and its sense comes to it retroactively. We need to have got to the end, that is to say, to this famous *Eternal Lord*.

We are, here, in the order of signifiers, and I hope I have made you feel what the continuity of the signifier is. A signifying unit presupposes the completion of a certain circle that situates its different elements.²⁹¹

Here, the *anticipatory* dimension of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making resides in the *presupposition* of a ‘completion’; the *retroactive* dimension of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making resides in the characterisation of this completion as a ‘certain circle that situates its different elements’.

²⁹⁰ Colette Soler, ‘Time and Interpretation’ in Feldstein, Fink and Jaanus, *Reading Seminars I and II*, 64.

²⁹¹ Lacan, *Seminar III*, 262-63.

One finds a particularly clear account of the anticipatory and retroactive dimensions of meaning-making in *Seminar V*. Here, Lacan defines the ‘structure of discourse’ in terms of a chain of signifiers (i.e., $S_1, S_2...S_n$) and a chain of signifieds ($s_1, s_2...s_n$). Lacan goes on to suggest that the ‘significations... produced according to the law of the signifying chain’ involve

...an anticipation of the signifying succession, every signifying chain opening out before it the horizon of its own completion, and at the same time... a retroaction, once there has come naturally the signifying term which, as one might say, overtakes the sentence, which means that what it produced at the level of the signified always has what one might call this retroactive function. Here S_2 already takes shape once S_1 has started, and is only completed when S_2 retroacts on S_1 .

In consequence, Lacan suggests that the signifier and the signified are ‘always out of phase to a certain degree’ – this phase difference bestowing on any emerging meaning or signified ‘something which is essentially metonymical’. To this extent, there is an evident resonance with Freud’s aforementioned suggestion, in ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’, to the effect that condensations displace the ‘centre’ of the dream (i.e., perturb or change its meaning) – where the dream centre thus displaced constitutes a new centre, on which basis further condensations may proceed. Condensation and displacement, metaphor and metonymy are thus to be conceived as *reciprocal* functions – *each implies the other*. Therefore, whilst characterising ‘every signification’ (i.e., meanings emerging in *consciousness*) as ‘essentially metonymical’, Lacan also suggests that this essence of metonymy also obtains by virtue of

...what links the signifying chain in itself to what constitutes it as such, to those links... those knots which we can here precisely call momentary...namely this beyond of the signifying chain to which we attempt to reduce it...²⁹²

²⁹² Ibid, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book V. The Formations of the Unconscious, 1957 – 1958*, unpublished transcript in Gallagher (trans), *Jacques Lacan in Ireland, Collected Translations and Papers*, <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book-05-the-formations-of-the-unconscious.pdf>, (17.08.12), Seminar 27, 25 June 1958, 356.

Here, I would suggest that Lacan's allusion to the 'momentary... knots' that are, at once, 'constitutive' and 'beyond' the signifying chain is, in effect, a reference to the 'hidden', metaphoric structure of the *point de capiton*, implicated in the metonymical 'linkages' of signs in chains whilst, 'in itself', resisting determination as a metaphysical entity or expression of such.

Finally, in 'The Instance of the Letter', Lacan suggests:

...the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning by deploying its dimension in some sense before it. As is seen at the level of the sentence when the latter is interrupted before the significant term: 'I'll never...', 'The fact remains...', 'Still perhaps...' Such sentences nevertheless make sense, and that sense is all the more oppressive in that it is content to make us wait for it...

Whence we can say that it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning *insists*, but that none of the chain's elements *consists* in the signification it can provide at that very moment.²⁹³

In this case, the anticipatory dimension of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making resides in the so-called *insistence* of the signifying chain – i.e., in what has been termed the *tension* between the conscious aspect of the signifier as a field of meaning/forms and the unconscious aspect of the signifier as a field of potentials. The retroactive dimension of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making is implicit in Lacan's next few comments:

The notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier thus comes to the fore – which Ferdinand de Saussure illustrates with an image resembling the wavy lines of upper and lower Waters in miniature from the manuscripts of Genesis. It is a twofold flood in which the landmarks – fine streaks of rain traced by vertical dotted lines that supposedly delimit corresponding segments – seem insubstantial.²⁹⁴

Lacan's reference is to the well-known, diagrammatic representation, in Saussure's *Cours*, of the field of 'thought-sound' (i.e., abstract concepts and phenomenal

²⁹³ Ibid, 'The Instance of the Letter', 419.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

representations).²⁹⁵ At first glance, precisely what Lacan means with regard to the ‘notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier’ may seem enigmatic (although the aforementioned reference, in *Seminar V*, to the ‘metonymical’ ‘phase’ difference between signifier and signified, provides a clue). Fink, however, provides a particularly lucid interpretation to the effect that, for the sake of argument, Lacan momentarily entertains the idea that, in discourse, signifieds are temporally contiguous with signifiers. From this perspective, one might conclude that, in the progression of signs, meaning simply builds step by step, additively or accumulatively.²⁹⁶ However, Lacan immediately rejects this conjecture, asserting, on the contrary, that

All our experience runs counter to this, which made me speak at one point in my seminar on the psychoses of the ‘button ties’ [*points de capiton*] required by this schema to account for the dominance of the letter in the dramatic transformation that dialogue can effect in the subject.²⁹⁷

What Lacan means by the ‘letter’ will merit further discussion in chapter three. At this point, it suffices to say that the ‘dominance of the letter’ is synonymous with the ‘insistence’ of the signifying chain. The import of Lacan’s comment is that, in conscious experience, the presence of *points de capiton* demonstrates that meaning is not, so to speak, *literally* a function of an ‘incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier’ (i.e., in the form of a continuum of additions and accumulations) but rather crystallises or precipitates in the form of a discontinuity or punctuation. In the process, there is effected, retroactively, a complete reconfiguration of the field of meaning (i.e., a ‘dramatic transformation... in the subject’). That the precipitation of the *point de capiton* is equivalent to a punctuation in ‘signification’ immediately resonates with the aforementioned suggestion that the unconscious manifests as a discontinuity in conscious

²⁹⁵ The illustration to which Lacan alludes may be found in Saussure, 112. Saussure’s illustration is reproduced in Lacan, *Seminar III*, 261. Further discussion of Saussure’s positing of a field of ‘thought-sound’ that is only conceivable as such by virtue of language may be found in 8.6.

²⁹⁶ For a useful discussion of Lacan’s reference to the ‘incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier’, see Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 111-14.

²⁹⁷ Lacan, ‘The Instance of the Letter’, 419.

processes of meaning-making and the idea that meaning-making *is* meaning-disturbance. However, notwithstanding the necessity for there to be a punctuation or discontinuity in signification in order to precipitate the *point de capiton*, Lacan's reference to a 'signifying unit' that 'situates its different elements' affirms, further, that the *point de capiton* is *not* conceivable as the precipitation of *a* meaning but, more precisely, designates the crystallisation and/or reconfiguration of a *field* of meaning.

A particularly apposite illustration of this point is given in Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989). Here, Žižek refers to the 'Lacanian *point de capiton*' as that which 'creates and sustains the identity of a given ideological field'.²⁹⁸ Still further, Žižek characterises the *point de capiton* as an '*ideological anamorphosis*' insofar as it is equivalent to the insistence of a particular perspective on a field of meaning, wherein that which is merely ideal and contingent is misconceived as real and determinate. In other words, as Žižek suggests, the *point de capiton* is, in effect, an ' "error of perspective" ' arising from its misrecognition as

...a point of supreme density of Meaning, a kind of Guarantee which, by being itself excepted from the differential interplay of elements, would serve as a stable and fixed point of reference.²⁹⁹

In this way, the *point de capiton* bears witness to a certain *privileging* in meaning-making. Indeed, one might conceive of the *point de capiton* in terms of the imposition of a distorting lens that not only renders visible but, in fact, generates stress fractures in the field of meaning thereby 'crystallized'. In itself, however, this 'distorting lens' is a purely formal feature that is and means nothing. In consequence, the *point de capiton* that masquerades, ostensibly, as a fully determined meaning or *meaning-that-is-made* is revealed to be merely a *gesture towards meaning*: the *form of meaning* or, better perhaps, the *form of meaning-in-the-making*. As Žižek puts it, the *point de capiton* is

²⁹⁸ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 87.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 99.

...nothing but a ‘pure difference’: its role is purely structural, its nature is purely performative – its signification coincides with its own act of enunciation; in short it is a ‘signifier without the signified’.³⁰⁰

Žižek’s understanding of the *point de capiton* harmonises well with Lacan’s conception of meaning as that which dissimulates as fully determined, essential, present, real, etc., but that is, in fact, ‘by nature imaginary’ and ‘always in the end evanescent’. Moreover, thus formulated, the *point de capiton* provides a way to resolve the question raised previously in relation to the seeming prevalence and persistence of these imaginary and illusory structures of meaning. Ultimately, that which is enduring and effective, in intersubjective, social and cultural reality (the greater part of which, it should be recalled, is, practically speaking, unconscious), is not a set of signifieds (i.e., determinate meanings) but rather a field of signifiers defined by the tension obtaining between the conscious aspect of the signifier as meaning/form and the unconscious aspect of the signifier as potential. It is precisely the misapprehension of a *point de capiton* as a determinate meaning or signified that gives rise to the illusion that a set of determinate meanings exists and endures above and beyond meaning/forms and meaning potentials. As Žižek observes, on the basis of these misrecognitions,

...the element which represents within the field of Meaning, the agency of pure signifier – the element through which the signifier’s non-sense erupts in the midst of Meaning – is perceived as a point of extreme saturation of Meaning, as the point which ‘gives meaning’ to all others and thus totalises the field of (ideological) meaning.³⁰¹

In chapter three, what Žižek terms the ‘agency of pure signifier’ will merit further attention in relation to the Lacanian conception of the ‘materialisation of the signifier’ and the ‘instance of the letter’. In the present context, however, I merely observe that Žižek’s characterisation of the *point de capiton* as ‘the element through which the signifier’s non-sense erupts in the midst of Meaning’, where it is ‘perceived as a point of extreme saturation of Meaning’, clearly resonates with the aforementioned suggestion

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

that, in accordance with the psychical function of repression/overdetermination, discontinuities in conscious expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making evince an overabundance of unconscious meaning – at least, *in potentia*.

It also may be observed that the Lacanian conception of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making in terms of the emergence of figures of discourse or *points de capiton* (where such a precipitation of meaning is structured in accordance with the laws of metaphor and metonymy) permits a more nuanced elucidation of the antinomy outlined in sections 1.4 and 2.1. In relation to the subjectivity expressed in *Victory over Death 2, Painting from “Malady”*, and related works, this conundrum resided in the apparent simultaneity of agency and automatism – or, equivalently, their expression of *an other meaning*, where this idea carried the dual implication: (1) meaning given by an other and (2) meaning made only insofar as it is susceptible to being *re-made*. On the basis of Lacan’s formulations in ‘The Instance of the Letter’, the metaphoric function, insofar as it is implicated in the production of new meaning, would appear to be synonymous with (1) creativity and agency and, therefore, (2) meaning made only insofar as it is susceptible to being re-made. By contrast, the metonymic function, insofar as it is implicated in the resistance to the production of new meaning, would appear to be synonymous with (1) an automatist reification and reiteration of *existing* meaning and, therefore, (2) meaning given by an other.

The critical point to grasp is that, insofar as works like *Victory over Death 2* and *Painting from “Malady”* come to signify, they bear witness to the *precipitation* and *perpetuation* of *points de capiton* that, ‘in themselves’, are structured metaphorically *and* metonymically. Given that the metaphoric structure of the *point de capiton* eludes metaphysical determination (i.e., ‘it’ is ‘hidden’), the ‘agency’ to which it corresponds has no existence other than as a stutter within a metonymically structured automatism. That is to say, always already, the ‘agent-like’, metaphoric discontinuity, associated with the production of ‘new’ meaning, is encountered *as* subsumed within the seemingly ‘automatist’, metonymic reiteration of existing meaning. To put the matter in equivalent terms, one might say that the metaphorically structured meaning-in-the-making (i.e., the

meaning discontinuity or disturbance that accompanies the fleeting irruption of the symptom or signifier) is immediately subsumed within the metonymically structured meaning-that-is-made (i.e., the, ostensibly, fully determined signified or *point de capiton*). In consequence, the metonymic continuity of discourse admits consideration as a sequence of subsumings or suturings, in accordance with which metaphoric discontinuities or disturbances subsist or insist as traces (i.e., as that which testifies to the so-called ‘return’ of repressed signifiers). From the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, then, ‘agency’ exists only in the form of fleeting discontinuities within a prevailing ‘automatism’. The ‘agent-like’ and metaphorical aspect of the *point de capiton* bears witness to the precipitation of (new) meaning. However, necessarily and inevitably, this precipitation is encountered in retrospect – *as* sutured into the ‘automatist’ and metonymic dimension of the *point de capiton* that bears witness to the perpetuation and transmission of meaning (i.e., that which sustains the imaginary appearance of an enduring, intersubjective, social and cultural reality).

Let us summarise the discussion in this second, thesis chapter. I have elaborated Lacan’s linguistic transformation of Freudian psychoanalysis in order to present a general understanding of the ambiguous and contradictory nature of subjectivity/meaning-making. In so doing, I have considered expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making in terms of a *tension* between consciousness and the unconscious (specifically, the conscious dimension of the signifier as a *meaning/form* and the unconscious dimension of the signifier as a *potential*). This tension has been explained, further, in terms of the operation, on the field of signifiers (or signifying chain), of a psychical function of meaning repression/overdetermination (or, equivalently, repression and the return of the repressed; the insistence of a signifier without a signified) in accordance with the structural laws of metaphor and metonymy. In other words, in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, there obtains a reciprocity between metaphor and metonymy that admits consideration as a *structuring of structure*, by virtue of which a synchronic metonymy that is unconscious metaphorically *becomes* as a diachronic metonymy in consciousness. In keeping with Lacanian theory, I have suggested that these operations are implicated in the *precipitation* and *perpetuation* of *points de capiton*.

Having shed some light on the nature of the subjectivity/meaning-making that manifests as ambiguity and contradiction, in the second part of the thesis, the focus shifts to an elaboration of the nature of *painting*, considered as an expression of this ambiguous and contradictory subjectivity. In pursuit of this aim, I present a more detailed elaboration of what, precisely, is involved in the *precipitation* and *perpetuation* of *points de capiton* with regard to what I will refer to as the *painted matter* of *Victory over Death 2, Painting from "Malady"*, and related works. In so doing, I pose two, basic questions. In chapter three, I ask *how does the meaning of painting come into being?* That is to say, I elucidate the ‘agent-like’, *metaphoric* dimension of the *precipitation* of *points de capiton* in painting – which I propose to call the *figuring of painting*.³⁰² In chapter four, I ask *how is the meaning of painting sustained?* That is to say, I elucidate the ‘automatist’, *metonymic* dimension of the *perpetuation* of *points de capiton* in painting – which I propose to call the *desire of painting*. These considerations will set the stage for the third part of the thesis, where the focus shifts from *painting* to *discourse* – i.e., the writing and testimony *surrounding* painting (notwithstanding the fact that, *as* language-mediated expressions of subjectivity, always already, *paintings* and *painted matter* demand to be understood *as* part of the discourse *on* painting and painted matter). Here, with regard to the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere, I propose that (1) the structuring of structure or reciprocity of metaphor and metonymy admits the equivalent formulation *figuring of desire* (thereby defining McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse as *discourses of desire*), and (2) this figuring of desire may be articulated in relation to the seeming prominence and persistence of two, inherently ambiguous, *points de capiton*: ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’.

³⁰² Given the equivalence between metaphors and symptomatic formations, this chapter may well have been titled ‘The symptom of painting’. Indeed, this terminology would be more in accord with Lacan, ‘The Instance of the Letter’, 439, where it is asserted that ‘the symptom *is* a metaphor... desire *is* a metonymy.’ See, also, *ibid*, *Seminar V*, Seminar 1, 6 November 1957, Seminar 26, 18 June 1958, 346, where Lacan asserts that ‘a symptom... is a signification. A symptom is a signified’. The term *figure* is preferred insofar as it conveys, more readily, perhaps, the manner by which painting (like any expression of subjectivity) is a meaning-forming and a forming-meaning that involves something akin to a *writing* in and of the psyche.

However, before proceeding with the following discussion, the terms ‘painted matter’ and ‘figuring’ demand further explanation. In the first place, I should point out that, by *painted matter*, I do *not* mean to privilege the physical reality of painted objects in any naïvely materialistic or metaphysical sense. By way of anticipating matters for consideration in chapter three, the term ‘painted matter’ refers to the manner by which, in accordance with the function of representation/symbolisation, and in common with *any* expression of subjectivity, painting is a *forming-meaning* and a *meaning-forming*. Always already, then, paintings are encountered as fields of *forms that mean* and *meaning/forms*: painted matter constitutes a field of *signs, signifiers, or figures*. On this basis, *figuring* refers to the manner by which expressions of subjectivity (of which *painting* is one example) give rise to meaning/forms or fields of such – a process or function that, as noted above, is synonymous with the precipitation of *points de capiton*. Hence, to ask: ‘how does the meaning of painting come into being?’ is, precisely, to ask: ‘how does the meaning of painting form?’ Likewise (looking ahead to chapter four) to ask ‘how is the meaning of painting sustained?’ is, precisely, to ask: ‘how are there sustained forms of meaning in painting?’ Moreover, in view of these considerations, it also should be clear that ‘painted matter’ and ‘figuring’ imply an inextricable entanglement of plastic and graphic, pictorial and symbolic, painting and writing.

Part 2 Painting

Chapter 3 The figuring of painting

3.1 *I believe, but don't believe*: the 'true' enunciation of painting

3.1.1 Painting negation

In chapter two, the agent-like, metaphoric dimension of the *point de capiton* was characterised in terms of the so-called 'return of the repressed' – i.e., as a fleeting irruption or discontinuity in discourse that is encountered *as* sutured into a prevailing, automatist metonymy, where 'it' subsists/insists as trace. In the first two sections of the present chapter, then, the questions of 'in what' the meaning of painting consists and 'how' this meaning comes into being will be elaborated by way of a deeper investigation into the nature of this 'trace-like' 'agency'. In pursuing this objective, I propose to engage with the figure AM I AM in the painted matter of *Victory over Death 2*. In chapter one, I observed that this figure (and, hence, the nature of the subjectivity/meaning-making of which it is a sign) is distinguished not merely by ambiguity of meaning but, indeed, by self-contradiction. This kind of an interpretation is consistent with the note linking the entries for *Practical Religion* and *Victory over Death 2* in the catalogue accompanying *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition*. Here, McCahon states:

The next also belongs to the *Practical Religion* series – a simple I AM at first. But not so simple really as doubts do come in here too. I believe, but don't believe.³⁰³

'I believe, but don't believe' is the phrase by which McCahon characterises what is, implicitly, expressed in the major, painted calligraphy of *Victory over Death 2*: 'a simple I AM at first. But not so simple really as doubts do come in here too.' That is to say, the manner by which 'I AM' is ultimately revealed also to be 'AM I AM'. In chapter six, I will suggest that ambiguous figures of this kind (in McCahon's painting, and in related testimony and writing) are proper to the *point de capiton* 'McCahon's doubt' in McCahon discourse. However, in the context of an elaboration of the 'agency' manifest

³⁰³ McCahon and O'Reilly, *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition*, 37.

in the painted matter of *Victory over Death 2*, what is more immediately relevant is the self-contradictory *form* of these statements. In both cases, within the broader context of existential and eschatological questions of faith and being, one encounters an assertion that is contradicted *in the assertion*. Hence, ‘I believe’ but, *at the same time*, ‘I don’t believe’; *AM I AM*, to reiterate the observation made in chapter one, is clearly self-contradictory insofar as it would appear to be a given that, *in the asking*, there exists *one who asks*. How, then, can this one doubt its own existence?

Also as suggested in chapter one, it is apparent that the antinomies, to which these formations ‘give voice’, proceed on the basis that the attitudes expressed are *of* or *for one* – specifically, a *one that is conscious*. However, in light of psychoanalytic theory, if the possibility is allowed that these contraries characterise a subjectivity that is *not* merely synonymous with an individual subject or self-sufficiency, but rather a subjectivity emerging in the form of a discontinuity or relation of tension between what is called consciousness and the unconscious, then the simultaneity of states of belief and unbelief, certainty and uncertainty, knowing and unknowing, poses no intractable, logical contradiction. From this perspective, the paradoxical form of these declarations where, within the space of a breath, something is asserted in concert with its opposite, admits consideration as what was previously termed a *speaking of two minds* or a speaking that evinces a *change of mind* in response to the irruption of *second thoughts*.

Indeed, on the basis of the discussion in chapter two, it would appear that assertions of this kind precisely admit consideration in terms of the precipitation/perpetuation of symptomatic formations or *points de capiton*. That is to say, the phrases ‘AM I AM’ and ‘I believe, but don’t believe’ constitute metonymic continua, within which inherent ambiguities or contradictions testify to a tension between consciousness and the unconscious – i.e., the subsistence/insistence of traces of the metaphoric stutters implicated in their formation. Hence, an investigation of the ‘agency’ involved in these expressions is commensurate with an investigation of these ‘traces’. In this regard, notwithstanding the primary impetus of this chapter to elucidate the manner by which expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making manifest in and as *painted matter*, I propose

to begin with an analysis of the trace of agency subsisting/insisting in the statement ‘I believe, but don’t believe’. This preliminary investigation will pave the way for an elaboration of the analogous, metaphoric stutter inherent in the painted figure AM I AM.

In the statement, ‘I believe, but don’t believe’, the word *but* is, evidently, the fulcrum on which equivocation pivots. As Bruce Fink observes, in English, the preposition ‘but’ fulfils a function similar to that, in French, of the so-called ‘expletive *ne*’.³⁰⁴ Here, Fink alludes to the commentary in works like ‘Remarks on Daniel Lagache’s Presentation: “Psychoanalysis and Personality Structure” ’ (1958) and *Seminar VII*, where Lacan pursues Freud’s assertion, in the essay ‘Negation’ (1925), that

...the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is *negated*. Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed...³⁰⁵

As Freud points out, in a clinical setting, negation takes the form of blurted admissions that are immediately retracted – the psychoanalytic interpretation being that what is denied on the plane of consciousness is, in fact, the ‘true speech’ of the unconscious. In keeping with this Freudian perspective, in ‘Remarks on Daniel Lagache’s Presentation’, Lacan suggests that, in turns of phrase employing *ne*, there is expressed ‘the subject of... desire’ or ‘the subject of the enunciation’, the ‘ambivalence’ of which is ‘characteristic of the unconscious’. This unconscious subjectivity or subject of the unconscious is to be distinguished from the conscious ‘ “I” of discourse’ or ‘the subject of the statement’.³⁰⁶ Similarly, in *Seminar VII*, Lacan asserts that negation (or *Verneinung*)

³⁰⁴ Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 38-41.

³⁰⁵ Freud, ‘Negation’ (1925) in SE, v19, 235.

³⁰⁶ Lacan, ‘Remarks on Daniel Lagache’s Presentation: “Psychoanalysis and Personality Structure” ’ in *Écrits*, (2006) (originally presented as ‘Remarque sur la rapport de Daniel Lagache: “Psychanalyse et structure de la personnalité” ’ at the Royaumont Colloquium, 10-13 July 1958 and originally published in *La Psychanalyse*, v6 (1961), 111-47), 556.

...is the privileged means of connotation at the level of discourse for whatever is *verdrängt* or repressed in the unconscious. *Verneinen* [to deny, to negate] is the paradoxical way in which what is hidden, *verborgen*, in the unconscious is located in spoken, enunciated discourse... *verneinen* is the manner in which what is simultaneously actualised and denied comes to be avowed.

Still further, Lacan reiterates that the seemingly superfluous ‘little “ne”... points to a discordance between the levels of enunciation and of the enunciated’ and that, in consequence, the ‘negative particle “ne” only emerges at the moment when I really speak, and not at the moment when I am spoken, if I am on the level of the unconscious.’³⁰⁷

3.1.2 Painting, speaking, writing

Here, however, it may be objected that, in seeking to elaborate the nature of the agency in McCahon’s *written* testimony and *painted* calligraphy, I am appealing to Lacan’s notion of an unconscious subjectivity *enunciating*. In other words, I am eliding distinctions between speaking, writing, and painting – as if these differing expressions of subjectivity are, in effect, equivalent or functionally isomorphic. That a vanishing of distinctions between different modes of subjectivity may be potentially problematic is evident from the dissimilarities obtaining between the clinical setting of psychoanalysis and the setting of the present study – i.e., the academic world of art history, theory, and criticism. The characterisation of the subject of the unconscious in terms of a subject enunciating reflects the fact that, in the space of the clinic, the analyst primarily addresses analysands’ *speech*. Indeed, to be precise, in a clinical situation, psychoanalysis, via free association, addresses parapraxes and other disturbances that, as a first approximation, admit consideration as the *spontaneous expression of speech* – i.e., *speech acts*. Strictly speaking, however, this study would appear not to engage with subjective *acts*, spontaneous or otherwise, but rather with *recordings* or *traces* of such in *objects* – i.e., *paintings* and *texts* – that function, thereby, as *signs of subjectivity*. In view of this state

³⁰⁷ Ibid, *Seminar VII*, 64. Here, the ‘I’ that ‘really speaks’ is the subject of the unconscious, whilst the ‘I’ that ‘is spoken’ is the conscious subject or ego.

of affairs, a further question arises: is it legitimate to psychoanalyse paintings and texts given that they carry only traces of the subjectivity that, in the spontaneous expression of speech, might appear to be fully and immediately present?

In response to these questions, it may be observed that, firstly, from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the elision of distinctions between speaking, writing, and painting *is* justified insofar as the unconscious subjectivity enunciating is considered to be the ‘true’ basis or origin of expressions of subjectivity *in general*. This perspective underscores the distinction Lacan makes, in ‘Function and Field’, between the ‘empty speech’ of conscious ego discourse and the ‘full speech’ that is unconscious³⁰⁸, and his claim, in *Seminar III*, that the unconscious is the domain of ‘true speech... something that speaks within the subject, beyond the subject, and even when the subject doesn’t know it’.³⁰⁹ Secondly, the legitimacy of psychoanalysing paintings and texts is secured insofar as, in both Freudian and Lacanian theory, unconscious *speech* is, itself, a metaphor for a *writing* in and of the psyche. By way of anticipating the following discussion, it may be noted that, conceived as effects of *writing*, expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making are neither simply nor immediately synonymous with the spontaneous expressions of beings-present but, on the contrary, testify to that which, necessarily and inevitably, is encountered in retrospect – always already presencing *as* absence, appearing *as* disappeared. Therefore, in conceiving of expressions of subjectivity as *that which is written*, as opposed to *that which speaks*, one is challenged to relinquish the metaphysical thinking evident in the privilege accorded to ‘ones that are conscious’ – where consciousness is considered to be equivalent to self-consciousness: immediate presence-to-self.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ For the relevant aspects of Lacan’s discussion of the difference between ‘empty’ and ‘full’ speech see *ibid*, ‘Function and Field’, 206-13.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*, *Seminar III*, 40-41.

³¹⁰ By way of amplifying points made in the thesis Introduction, I should acknowledge that, with specific reference to the major, painted script of *Victory over Death 2*, the distinction between ‘saying “I” ’ and ‘writing “I” ’ forms the basis of discussion in Smythe. In harmony with the present study, Smythe observes that ‘In saying “I” it is as if, during the brief instant of my utterance, I deliver myself wholly intact into the space of language’ (27) – even if, as Smythe

concedes, the ‘apparent experience of self-presence or “pure” auto-affectivity’ is not, ‘in any sense inviolate’ (49, n2). Smythe goes on to suggest that

In writing ‘I’, by contrast, it is as though the ‘I’ of my speech had, in the midst of its transposition to writing, abruptly withdrawn its ties to my identity and selfhood... so that insofar as my written “I” retains a voice, it is a voice that can no longer be identified as my own... [or] attributed to a determinate speaking subject at all... (27-28)

Subsequently, Smythe appeals to Blanchot’s literary theory in support of the idea that, in relation to the (written/painted) ‘I’ of *Victory over Death* 2,

...there is only one speaker whose voice might be faintly discerned at the heart of McCahon’s painting, that of language itself, understood as a strange and endless murmuring onto which – according to Blanchot – literature always opens, a phenomenon that he refers to as the ‘voiceless’ speech of ‘the neuter.’ (29)

In referring to ‘The voice of the neuter’ (46), Smythe makes particular reference to Blanchot’s ‘The Narrative Voice (the ‘he,’ the neuter)’ in George Quasha (ed), *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader: fiction and literary essays* (Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press, 1999), 459-69. I refer to slightly different translation of this essay in Blanchot, ‘The Narrative Voice (*the “he,” the neutral*)’ in *The Infinite Conversation*, 379-87. From the perspective of this project, it is striking to what degree Blanchot’s conception of the ‘narrative voice’ or ‘neutral voice’ resonates with what, in Lacanian terms, corresponds to the order of the real-as-impossible, synonymous with, yet inassimilable, to language-mediated expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making (i.e., that which, in the present chapter, will be referred to as the ‘lettering/tracing/differencing’ proper to the function of ‘pure difference’, the ‘unary trait’ or the ‘essence’ of the signifier). Hence, Blanchot asserts that

The narrative... voice... has no place in the work, but neither does it hang over it; far from falling out of some sky under the guarantee of superior Transcendence... [it is] rather a kind of void in the work... the narrative voice... neutral voice that speaks the work from out of this place without a place, where the work is silent. (385)

Still further, in a footnote (to which Smythe also refers, 47), Blanchot defines the narrative voice as that which

...does not simply take the place traditionally occupied by a subject, a mobile fragmentation; it modifies what we mean by place: a fixed location, unique or determined by its placement...

and, furthermore, that which

...designates “its” place as both the place from which it will always be missing and that will thus remain empty, but also as a surplus of place, a place that is always too many: hypertopia. (462, n2)

Blanchot’s conception of the narrative voice as a ‘mobile fragmentation’ that ‘modifies what we mean by place’ resonates with the (somewhat Heideggerian) interpretation I will offer (in section 3.2) of the *way of being* or *modality* of the Lacanian letter-as-lettering, trace-as-tracing. Still further, the idea that the narrative voice names ‘“its” place as both the place from which it will

In 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (1895), Freud's model of memory formation and recall exemplifies the idea that expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making admit consideration in terms of a writing in and of the psyche. Here, Freud hypothesises that the nervous system is comprised of two classes of neurones that, in accordance with the functioning of 'contact-barriers', mediate the transmission of excitations or quantities of cathexis (i.e., psychical energy or $Q\dot{\eta}$):

...those which allow $Q\dot{\eta}$ to pass through as though they had no contact-barriers and which, accordingly, after each passage of excitation are in the same state as before, and... those whose contact-barriers makes themselves felt, so that they only allow $Q\dot{\eta}$ to pass through with difficulty or partially. The latter class may, after each excitation, be in a different state from before and they thus afford a *possibility of representing memory*.³¹¹

In consequence, Freud suggests that

...there are *permeable* neurones (offering no resistance and retaining nothing), which serve for perception, and *impermeable* ones (loaded with resistance, and holding back $Q\dot{\eta}$), which are vehicles of memory and so probably of psychical processes in general.³¹²

Freud proposes to designate the system of permeable neurones ϕ and the system of impermeable neurones ψ . Memory inheres in the amenability of the ψ neurones (or, more precisely, the disposition of their contact-barriers) to being 'brought into a permanently altered state... by the passage of an excitation.' That is to say, neurones of this kind possess the capacity to *be written* and to preserve the *trace* of writing. Indeed, Freud suggests that the phenomenon of 'relearning on the basis of memory' implies that

always be missing... [and] as a surplus of place' harmonises with what may be termed the 'trace-like' nature of the Lacanian letter or essence of the signifier as 'that' which presences as absence, appears as disappeared – even as it enlivens the infinite field of differences or trace structure, by virtue of which, always already, 'the' signifier is a 'universe' of such.

³¹¹ Freud, 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (1895) in SE, v1, 299.

³¹² Ibid, 299-300.

alterations result in ‘the contact-barriers... [of the ψ neurones] becoming more capable of conduction, less impermeable, and so more like those of the ϕ system.’ This state of the contact barriers becoming more conductive, Freud terms their ‘degree of *facilitation* [*Bahnung*],’ such that ‘*Memory is represented by the facilitations existing between the ψ neurones.*’ Still further, Freud observes that if the degree of facilitation among ψ neurones was invariant (i.e., if all ψ neurones offered equal resistance to the passage of excitations)

...then the characteristics of memory would evidently not emerge. For, in relation to the passage of an excitation, memory is evidently one of the powers which determine and direct its pathway, and, if facilitation were everywhere equal, it would not be possible to see why one pathway should be preferred. We can therefore say still more correctly that *memory is represented by the differences in the facilitations between the ψ neurones.*³¹³

On the basis of Freud’s model of the psyche, it should be apparent that, contrary to information storage in computers (i.e., in flash memory or on hard disc), memories are neither determinate properties of particular, material elements (i.e., neurones) nor even in the connections between them (i.e., the neuronal network or system). Rather, in response to repeated passages of excitations, memory inheres in the manner by which the contact-barriers between ψ neurones become more conductive *differentially* such that certain passages of excitation are ‘preferred’. Here, it is crucial to appreciate that, on Freud’s account, memory is *not* identical with the preferred path or passage of excitation. The difference between ‘memory’ and ‘preferred path’ is analogous to the distinction between an immaterial force and the matter bearing its imprint – or, perhaps, the difference between an immaterial *process* of writing and its material *products*: i.e., written marks. Memory, considered as a psychical process of path-making or writing, would seem to be that which, fundamentally, exceeds and eludes any material instantiation.

The operation of memory in terms of writing is even more explicit in Freud’s short essay ‘A Note upon the “Mystic Writing Pad” ’ (c.1924-25). The so-called ‘ “Mystic

³¹³ Ibid, 300.

Writing Pad” ’ is invoked to circumvent a difficulty arising from the fact that memory-as-writing makes two, apparently incompatible, demands. Firstly, the space of memory inscription must possess ‘an unlimited receptive capacity’, and secondly, it must retain ‘permanent traces’. As Freud points out, writing in chalk on a slate meets the first condition – but only at the expense of the second (one loses one’s ‘memories’ when one wipes the slate clean). Conversely, writing in ink on paper fulfils the second condition but cannot meet the first (the paper eventually fills up with writing so that the recording of further memory traces requires a clean sheet – in effect, a brand-new psychical apparatus).³¹⁴ Freud explains that the ‘Mystic Pad’ avoids the mutually excluded ‘functions’ of unlimited receptivity and permanent tracing ‘*by dividing them between two separate but interrelated component parts or systems.*’³¹⁵ Notwithstanding the limitations of this illustration, Freud suggests that the two ‘systems’ in question are analogous to (1) perception-consciousness, which ‘receives stimuli... [but] forms no permanent traces’, and (2) the ‘foundations of memory’ in the ‘unconscious mnemonic systems’.³¹⁶

In his essay ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’ (1966), Derrida highlights the resonance between the Freudian conception of *bahnung* and a psychical writing, tracing, differencing (indeed, *différance*). Thus, Derrida suggests that, between the ‘Project’ and ‘A Note upon the “Mystic Writing Pad” ’, Freud’s work follows ‘a strange progression: a problematic of breaching [i.e., *bahnung*] is elaborated only to conform increasingly to a metaphoric of the written trace.’³¹⁷ Derrida goes on to draw parallels

³¹⁴ Ibid, ‘A Note upon the “Mystic Writing Pad” ’ (c.1924-25) in SE, v19, 227.

³¹⁵ Ibid, 230. As Freud points out (ibid, 228-230), the first ‘system’ comprises a transparent sheet with two layers – a protective, upper layer of celluloid and a delicate, lower layer of thin, waxed paper. The second ‘system’ consists of a slab of dark resin or wax. One places the double-layered, transparent sheet on the pad and, using a stylus, writes upon its upper, celluloid surface. The stylus presses the lower, waxed paper surface of the transparent sheet onto the resin/wax slab, producing dark marks upon the celluloid. To erase these marks, one simply peels the double-layered transparent sheet from the resin/wax slab. However, the pressure of the stylus leaves permanent traces impressed in the resin/wax slab surface.

³¹⁶ Ibid, 230-31.

³¹⁷ Derrida, ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’ in *Writing and Difference*, trans with an introduction and additional notes by Alan Bass (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2001

between Freud's account of *bahnung* and the two moments proper to the operation of the trace or the movement of *différance* in opening up and sustaining the space in which meaning is made – namely, *differencing* and *deferring*.³¹⁸ What is crucial to appreciate, in Derrida's essay, is that there is no question of taking literally Freud's 'neurological fable'.³¹⁹ For Derrida, Freud's conception of memory in terms of a writing in and of the psyche is of interest insofar as it highlights the manner by which the 'trace' exceeds and eludes metaphysical determination – such that *différance* demands to be considered as 'a

(1978), originally presented as 'Freud et la scène de l'écriture' at the Institut de Psychanalyse and originally published in *Tel Quel*, n26, Summer 1966), 251.

³¹⁸ See, for example, *ibid*, 252-53, where Derrida invokes Freud's understanding of memory as inhering in differences between facilitations so that 'It is the difference between breaches which is the true origin of memory, and thus of the psyche.' In consequence, Derrida suggests:

We then must not say that breaching without difference is insufficient for memory; it must be stipulated that there is no pure breaching without difference. Trace as memory is not a pure breaching that might be reappropriated at any time as simple presence; it is rather the ungraspable and invisible difference between breaches.

Derrida also proposes:

All these differences in the production of the trace may be reinterpreted as moments of deferring. In accordance with a motif that will continue to dominate Freud's thinking, this movement is described as the effort of life to protect itself by *deferring* a dangerous cathexis, that is, by constituting a reserve (*Vorrat*). The threatening expenditure or presence are deferred with the help of a breaching or repetition.

Here, Derrida is referring to Freud, 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (1895) in SE, v1, 296-97, where a distinction is made between a 'primary function of the nervous system', which seeks to fully discharge *Q*, and a 'secondary function' that preserves 'a store of *Q*' sufficient to meet the demand for a specific action' – e.g., to relieve hunger. Nevertheless, Freud maintains that, in general, the 'trend persists... to keep the *Q*' as low as possible and to guard against any increase of it – that is, to keep it constant.' On this basis, and in a fashion that clearly anticipates his later models of the psyche in terms of a homeostasis maintained by virtue of the mediation of the primary process by the secondary process (or, equivalently, by virtue of the mediation of the pleasure principle by the reality principle), Freud concludes: 'All the functions of the nervous system can be comprised either under the aspect of the primary function or of the secondary one imposed by the exigencies of life.' In other words, the differences in facilitations, by virtue of which memory is as writing and tracing, do not produce a complete discharge of cathexis but, on the contrary, and in accordance with the mediating activity of the 'secondary function', defer this kind of a total release in order to maintain sufficient *Q* for the preservation of the life of the organism.

³¹⁹ Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', 251.

non-origin which is originary... determined outside any teleological or eschatological horizon.’³²⁰

Throughout Lacan’s work, one also finds acknowledgements and elaborations of Freud’s conception of unconscious psychical processes as a form of writing. For example, in *Seminar II*, Lacan proposes that ‘The best thing we’ve found for giving an image of the phenomenon of memory is the Babylonian wax seal... what we call an engram.’ On this basis, Lacan suggests that the functioning of human memory is analogous to a ‘homeostat’ – a ‘machine’ in which a ‘message’ circulates, ‘turning back on itself... indefinitely’ in a fashion that ‘comes very close to what we can conceive of as *Zwang*, the compulsion to repeat.’³²¹ Indeed, discussing Freud’s conception of memory formation in the ‘Project’, Lacan invokes the phrase ‘play of writing’ to characterise Freud’s understanding of ‘memory... as a succession of engrams, as the sum of a series of facilitations.’³²² Moreover, in *Seminar VII*, with reference to Freud’s so-called letter 52 to Wilhelm Fliess (in which Freud begins to elaborate his theory of unconscious psychical processes), Lacan observes that Freud’s ‘whole theory of memory has to do with the sequence of *Niederschriften*, of inscriptions’, where a

...*Niederschrift*... [is] something that presents itself not simply in terms of *Prägung* [i.e., *stamping*, *embossing*] or of impression, but in the sense of something which makes a sign and which is of the order of writing.³²³

However, that the manifestation of the subject of the unconscious exhibits (in Derridean parlance) the *trace structure* proper to *writing*, *painting* or, indeed, all *differencing*, is, perhaps, more evident from Lacan’s suggestion, in *Seminar XI*, that ‘the *one* that is

³²⁰ Ibid, 255.

³²¹ Lacan, *Seminar II*, 88-89. The Freudian notion of repetition compulsion will merit further attention in chapter four – the crucial point being, in this regard, that repetition compulsion testifies to something that is ‘beyond’ (i.e., exceeds or is inassimilable to) the homeostasis of primary and secondary processes, the pleasure principle and the reality principle.

³²² Ibid, 107-08.

³²³ Ibid, *Seminar VII*, 50.

introduced by the experience of the unconscious is the *one* of the split, of the stroke, of rupture.³²⁴ Indeed, properly speaking, the subject of the unconscious has no existence prior to the advent of this discontinuity but, on the contrary, is synonymous with it. Hence, as Lacan suggests, the subject of the unconscious manifests in the form of a discontinuity or differencing where

...the stroke of the opening makes absence emerge – just as the cry does not stand out against a background of silence, but on the contrary makes the silence emerge as silence.³²⁵

The ‘trace-like’ nature of the subject of the unconscious is further reiterated in Lacan’s characterisation of it as being ‘situated’ ‘in the dimension of a synchrony’ in which ‘it loses itself as much as it finds itself again’³²⁶ and in terms of the ‘rhythmic... pulsation of... [a] slit’, the opening and closing of which is not chronologically real but rather defines a hypothetical interval within a purely ‘logical time’.³²⁷

On the basis of Lacan’s account, then, the subject of the unconscious clearly resists metaphysical determination. As a writing/tracing/differencing – a structure of differential traces – ‘it’ would demand to be considered as a ‘being’ that finds itself *as* lost, presences *as* absence, appears *as* disappeared. Insofar as it is implicated in the figuring of painting, this writing/tracing/differencing (equivalent to the irruption/subsuming of the subject of the unconscious in consciousness or the agent-like, metaphoric dimension of the precipitation of *points de capiton*) demands further investigation. In the following section, this will involve an elucidation of what Lacan considers synonymous with the manifestation of the subject of the unconscious – namely: (1) the ‘materialisation’ of the signifier, (2) the ‘instance’ or, better perhaps, ‘agency’ or ‘insistence’, of the ‘letter’, and (3) the manner by which the strange or ambiguous ‘materiality’ of the letter defines the

³²⁴ Ibid, *Seminar XI*, 26.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid, 32.

trace-like 'essence of the signifier' or 'unary trait'. These considerations will clarify how 'materiality', 'mark-making', and 'painting' relate to 'figuring' and will thus serve to illuminate the figuring of painting in that part of McCahon discourse encompassing the *painted matter* of *Victory over Death 2 et al* – in particular, the painted matter of the figure AM I AM.

3.2 The *figuring* of painting

3.2.1 The materialisation of the signifier

In 'The Subversion of the Subject', Lacan suggests that the subject of the unconscious manifests in

...the very place at which the transparency of the classical subject divides, undergoing, as it does, the effects of fading that specify the Freudian subject due to its occultation by an ever purer signifier.³²⁸

Whilst undoubtedly laconic, this statement provides an exemplary launching point from which to consider the relationship between the subject of the unconscious and the materialisation of the signifier. Let us unpack some of its complexity. In the first place, in speaking of the 'transparency of the classical subject', I take Lacan to be referring to the immediate auto-affection or presence-to-self that characterises the Cartesian ego – a subject that, by virtue of its limpid pellucidity, knows itself immediately and absolutely as a 'one that is conscious'. By contrast, the term 'Freudian subject' may be understood as the dialectical successor of the 'classical subject' when it is re-conceived as (1) decentred in relation to the Other of language or the symbolic order, and (2) expressing a relation of tension between consciousness and the unconscious (i.e., where the 'transparency of the classical subject divides').³²⁹ Secondly, by referring to the 'effects of fading', I take Lacan to imply that the contradictory speaking of two minds that characterises manifestations of the subject of the unconscious in consciousness is not only characterised by the *expression of negation* (e.g., *ne/but*) but, more literally, admits consideration as *self-negation*. That is to say, the corollary of the fleeting manifestation

³²⁸ Ibid, 'Subversion of the Subject', 677-78.

³²⁹ In characterising the 'Freudian' subject as decentred, I am appealing to *Seminar II*, where Lacan invokes the term 'Copernican revolution' in relation to Freud's conception of subjectivity. See Lacan, *Seminar II*, 3, 7, 8.

of the subject of the unconscious (or the 'return' of repressed signifiers) is the equally transitory nullification or occlusion of the self-conscious subject or ego.

Support for this interpretation may be found in *Seminar II*, where Lacan provides a more comprehensive account of the manner by which the Freudian subject 'fades'. Here, Lacan characterises consciousness as

...a polar tension between an *ego* alienated from the subject and a perception which fundamentally escapes it, a pure *percepi*. The subject would be strictly identical to this perception if there weren't this *ego* which... makes it emerge from out of itself in a relation of tension.³³⁰

The ego is 'alienated' insofar as it is neither entirely nor sufficiently 'in' and 'of' itself but rather that which emerges by virtue of a dialectical relation with an other – an identity with a mirror image that, inevitably, miscarries. The 'pure perception', to which Lacan refers is, in effect, 'the experience of the unconscious subject as such, concerning which we no longer know who or what it is' and, indeed, when the 'subject is precipitated into a confrontation' with this unconscious subjectivity (i.e., where these confrontations manifest in the form of parapraxes or the seeming *changes-of-mind* that *ne/but* signify), the 'imaginary relation', on which basis is conceived the ego's self-certainty, 'reaches its own limit, and the ego fades away, dissipates, becomes disorganised, dissolves.'³³¹

However, what is of particular interest, in Lacan's terse formula, is the suggestion that the manifestation of the subject of the unconscious occurs in conjunction with a 'fading' of the conscious subject 'due to its occultation by an ever purer signifier'. Philippe Van Haute suggests that the term '“pure” signifier' refers to 'the operation of the order of signifiers independent of its possible meaning effects... in its sheer materiality.'³³² From this perspective, Lacan's statement would appear to imply that the manifestation of the

³³⁰ Ibid, 177.

³³¹ Ibid, 178.

³³² Philippe Van Haute, *Against Adaptation: Lacan's "subversion of the Subject"*, trans Paul Crowe and Miranda Vanker (New York: Other Press, 2002), 43-44.

subject of the unconscious is synonymous with the *materialisation of the signifier*. Leaving aside, for the moment, a consideration of the precise nature of this materiality, Lacan's testimony implies that, in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, symptomatic disturbances are equivalent to, or occur in concert with, the production or precipitation of the forms or elements from which these expressions are constituted – i.e., signifiers. Support for this interpretation can be found in *Seminar VII* and *Seminar XI* where, in both cases, Lacan locates that which is to be attributed to the unconscious 'between' consciousness and perception.³³³ Thus, in the passage from *Seminar VII* previously encountered in chapter two, Lacan asserts:

...between perception and consciousness... is inserted... The thought processes insofar as they regulate... the structure in which the unconscious is organised, the structure in which the underlying unconscious mechanisms are flocculated. And it is this which makes the small curds of representation... something which has the same structure as the signifier...³³⁴

Similarly, in *Seminar XI*, Lacan characterises the 'locus where the affair of the subject of the unconscious is played out' as being 'situated between perception and consciousness' where, in the 'interval that separates them... the place of the Other is situated, in which the subject is constituted', and in which, moreover, that which Freud terms 'traces of perception... *Wahrnehmungszeichen*' can be given 'their true name of *signifiers*.'³³⁵

³³³ Here, again, it is important to distinguish between what, in *Seminar II*, Lacan terms the 'pure *percipi*' that 'fundamentally escapes' consciousness and which is, indeed, 'the experience of the unconscious subject as such', and what might be called the perception *of* consciousness or the *conscious dimension of perception*. This is simply to reaffirm that, always already, phenomena characterised *as* unconscious or attributed *to* the unconscious (e.g., 'pure perceptions') are in the nature of hypotheses posed *from the perspective of consciousness* in order to account for disturbances or discontinuities in its 'own' representations/symbolisations. Indeed, as I suggested in chapter two (see n212), even consciousness can be considered as a conceptual abstraction from what is 'primary' – namely, language-mediated subjective experience *per se*. Always already, then, that which consciousness apprehends in its 'own' representations/symbolisations is, at the same time, conceivable as that which is represented/symbolised *to it*.

³³⁴ Lacan, *Seminar VII*, 61.

³³⁵ *Ibid*, *Seminar XI*, 45-46.

3.2.2 The *instance* of the letter

At this point, one encounters an evident difficulty: if signifiers are *nothing* apart from their negative relations of difference then how may one coherently conceive of ‘a pure signifier’ in ‘its’ ‘sheer materiality’? In what does the ‘materiality’ of the signifier consist? Relevant, in this regard, are Lacan’s references to the *letter* in works ranging from the ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter” ’ to *Seminar XVIII*. Notwithstanding certain ambiguities in Lacan’s testimony, I would argue (in common with various commentators) that the ‘materiality’ of the signifier, most efficaciously conceived, is neither simply nor immediately synonymous with a substantial, physical, empirical reality. By way of elaborating this position, I suggest that, firstly, it is necessary to distinguish between (1) *the letter* (i.e., as some kind of material mark or metaphysical entity) and (2) the *letter-as-lettering* (i.e., the *way of being* of the letter as a *writing/tracing/differencing* synonymous with what has been termed the ‘real’ ‘structuring of structure’, the psychical function of repression/overdetermination, or the insistence of a signifier without a signified). Secondly, insofar as the letter may be defined as a ‘real writing’ or ‘writing in the real’, it is necessary to distinguish between *metaphysical* and *logico-structural* conceptions of the real. That is to say, one must distinguish between the real conceived as (1) *hypothetical material substrate of* and (2) *structurally necessary impossibility implicated in* the function of representation/symbolisation (where this understanding of the real as the order of the impossible is precisely what is proper to the letter-as-lettering – the essential ‘matter’ of the signifier). In keeping with the ‘anti-metaphysical’ tenor of the model of Lacanian theory presented in this study, in what follows, I will prioritise the second options in the two couples above.

Thus, in ‘The Instance of the Letter’, Lacan suggests, firstly, that the letter is to be taken ‘Quite simply, literally [*à la lettre*]’, and secondly, may be defined as the ‘material medium [*support*] that concrete discourse borrows from language.’³³⁶ In the first part of this succinct formula, the suggestion that the letter may be ‘taken literally’ immediately

³³⁶ Lacan, ‘The Instance of the Letter’, 413.

invites its conception as that which, entirely and sufficiently, ‘is’ in and of ‘itself’ – i.e., a *real essence*. Addressing the latter part of the formula, Fink observes that, by ‘concrete discourse’, Lacan means ‘speech’ and that, moreover, what speech ‘borrows’ from language are ‘its signifiers and grammatical rules’.³³⁷ In consequence, the letter would appear to denote the material medium of signifiers and their associated grammar – where, moreover, ‘material medium’ implies ‘real’. To this extent, as Evans puts it, ‘The letter is... connected with the real, a material substrate that underpins the symbolic order.’³³⁸

However, I would argue that a more nuanced and complete understanding of the nature of the letter’s ‘material reality’ challenges one to appreciate that the *instance* (i.e., ‘agency’, ‘insistence’) of the letter, synonymous with the materialisation of the signifier, defines a *writing, tracing, or differencing*. This may be inferred from Lacan’s Saussurean allusion to the ‘synchronic system of differential couplings... necessary to discern vocables in a given language [*langue*]’, which

...allows us to see that an essential element in speech itself was predestined to flow into moveable type which... renders validly present what I call the “letter” – namely, the essentially localized structure of the signifier.³³⁹

Lacan’s prose is characteristically challenging. However, by ‘synchronic system of differential couplings’, I take Lacan to mean the temporally instantaneous constellation of signifiers-as-potentials that are unconscious. In suggesting that an ‘essential element in speech... was *predestined* to flow into moveable type’ (my italics), I take Lacan to imply that something in speech is, *always already*, ‘typed’ or ‘type-set’ – i.e., always already, the product or form of *marking* or *impressing*. Thus, the *essential* element in speech (or,

³³⁷ Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 76-77. See also Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, 28.

³³⁸ Evans, 100. This said, Evans fully acknowledges the complex and ambiguous status of Lacan’s conception of the real. Hence, whilst noting that ‘The real... has connotations of matter, implying a material substrate underlying the imaginary and the symbolic’, Evans accords greater stress to the manner by which, in Lacan’s work after 1953, ‘the real emerges as that which is outside language and inassimilable to symbolisation’, on which basis Lacan is led to ‘link the real with the concept of impossibility’ (159-60).

³³⁹ Lacan, ‘The Instance of the Letter’, 418.

indeed, any expression of subjectivity) is this marking or impressing – although, by way of anticipating the following discussion, this is not to suggest, necessarily, that the ‘essential element’ in question is a metaphysical entity or expression of such.

Moreover, by virtue of this mark-making, Lacan suggests that the letter is rendered ‘validly present’ as the ‘essentially localized structure of the signifier.’ Fink’s analysis of Lacan’s essay highlights the ambiguity of this phrase. In Fink’s view, the expression ‘essentially localized structure of the signifier’ refers to the ‘micro- or nanostructure of the signifier’. At the same time, however, the ‘letter’ rendered ‘validly present’ ‘seems to lie somewhere between the signifier and its microstructure (which is materialised or represented by type or printed characters without being equated with them)’. By ‘microstructure’, I take Fink to be alluding to those differential traces in relation to which signifiers mean. Support for this interpretation is provided by Fink’s illustrative contrasting of the words ‘nipple’ and ‘nibble’. Fink observes that, in this case, their ‘differential coupling’ resides in the *difference* between ‘p’ and ‘b’. In other words, ‘in itself’, the ‘essentially localized structure of the signifier’ is not a ‘positive’ or ‘present’ ‘entity’ but rather a *trace* (i.e., a presencing *as* absence; an appearing *as* disappeared). On this basis, Fink asks: ‘But is this the *meaning* of the letter? Or is that the wrong question: Is this the direction or directionality (*sens*) of the letter?’ In consequence, Fink concludes that, whilst type or printed characters ‘“render validly present” or embody what Lacan calls the letter’, the letter thus ‘materialised would not *seem* to be material itself.’³⁴⁰

Broadly speaking, Fink’s analysis harmonises with the understanding of ‘materiality’ presented in Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Title of the Letter, A Reading of Lacan* (1973). Here, for example, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe anticipate Fink’s observation that to ‘render validly present’ the letter is to ‘embody’ it by way of a reference to ‘Function and Field’, where Lacan suggests that ‘Speech is in fact a gift of language, and language is not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but body it is.’³⁴¹ As Nancy

³⁴⁰ Fink, *Lacan to the Letter*, 78-79.

³⁴¹ Lacan, ‘Function and Field’, 248, quoted in Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, 28-29.

and Lacoue-Labarthe affirm, ‘materiality’, thus conceived, reflects the psychoanalytic insight that words may elicit symptoms expressed somatically. Implicitly, then, the ‘materiality’ of the signifier would appear to be that which undermines absolute distinctions between mind and body, the ideality of meaning and the corporeality of matter.³⁴² Furthermore, resonating with Fink’s suggestion that the letter thus ‘materialised would not *seem* to be material itself’, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe refer to the ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter”’, where Lacan stresses, firstly, that the ‘relations with location’ evinced by the misplaced letter in Poe’s story and by the signifier are encapsulated in the notion of ‘“nullibeity”’ – a localisation that inheres in the condition or state of being nowhere. Secondly, Lacan defines the ‘materiality of the signifier’ as ‘*singular* in many ways, the first of which is not to allow of partition. Cut a letter into small pieces and it remains the letter it is’.³⁴³ Whilst Lacan’s meaning is somewhat oblique, it may be suggested that the properties of nullibeity and indivisibility imply that the letter – the ‘real’ and ‘essential’ ‘matter’ of the signifier – defines a materiality that exceeds and eludes absolute distinctions between presence and absence, part and whole, identity and difference.³⁴⁴ In consequence, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe observe that ‘This localisation and indivisibility... lend an *odd* materiality to the signifier. This materiality is itself odd in that it is *unquantifiable*’.³⁴⁵ Still further, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe conclude that the letter (or, to paraphrase Fink, ‘the material medium of

³⁴² That is to say, as expressed, rhetorically, in Barbara Johnson, ‘The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida’ in *Yale French Studies*, n55/56, Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise (1977), 493, ‘what if the signifier were precisely what puts the polarity of “materiality/ideality” in question?’

³⁴³ Lacan, ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter”’, 16, referenced in Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, 28.

³⁴⁴ A degree of support for this interpretation may be found in Andrea Hurst, *Derrida Vis-à-vis Lacan, Interweaving Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 376. Here, Hurst suggests that ‘Lacan’s insistence on the indivisibility of the letter is by no means a fundamental idealization... that supports a covert metaphysics of presence.’ On the contrary, ‘Lacan’s insistence that it cannot be divided evokes no “thing-in-itself” but the Real in its unspeakable singularity’ where, as ‘Lacan repeatedly affirms... the Real is a matter of splitting rather than presence or absence.’

³⁴⁵ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, 28.

signifiers and their associated grammar’) resists any kind of naïvely materialistic or metaphysical determination:

If it is a question... of a materiality of language as well as of the unconscious, this materiality is not to be conceived as a *substantial* materiality, at least according to what classical materialism is said to claim. The letter is matter, but not substance. This unqualifiable term, apparently irreducible to any of the oppositions of traditional philosophic conceptuality, will assume the “major place”... in what, since Freud, is called “the unconscious.”³⁴⁶

3.2.3 Writing in the real: the letter and the unary trait

Notwithstanding the ‘oddness’ of the letter’s ‘material reality’, Lacanian theory also implies that the equivalence obtaining between the ‘manifestation’ of the subject of the unconscious and the ‘materialisation’ of the signifier encompasses the ‘instance’ of the letter as a ‘real writing’ or ‘writing in the real’. Support for this reading may be found in *Seminar XVIII*, where Lacan flourishes what he describes as ‘a little jingle’: ‘Writing, the letter, is in the real, and the signifier, in the symbolic.’³⁴⁷ However, the particular setting in which this statement is made suggests that the real thus invoked is *not* a ‘material substrate’ underlying appearances, *in which* letter-like ‘entities’ come into being. This, I would suggest, is implicit in Lacan’s rhetorical challenge: ‘is not the letter the literal because it is founded on the littoral?’ – where the littoral is defined as ‘something that posits a domain, as being entirely making with another, if you wish, a frontier, but precisely because they have absolutely nothing in common, not even a reciprocal relation.’ In other words, the littoral signifies an alterity so radical that ‘what’ one confronts, strictly speaking, is not *a* difference or *a* relation *between entities* but rather ‘pure difference’ – ‘in itself’, fundamentally impossible to represent/symbolise. To this

³⁴⁶ Ibid, 29. A similar point is made in Johnson, 495. Here, it is asserted that the indivisibility of the Lacanian letter implies that

...the letter... and the signifier *are not substances*. The letter cannot be divided because it only functions *as* a division... it is a *difference*... known only in its effects. The signifier is an articulation in a chain, not an identifiable unit.

³⁴⁷ Lacan, *Seminar XVIII*, Seminar 7, 12 May 1971, 14.

extent, the letter as the littoral precisely would appear to express the real-as-impossibility that, as structural necessity, is at once synonymous with *and* inassimilable to the function of representation/symbolisation: 'The edge of the hole in knowledge that psychoanalysis designates precisely, when it tackles it, from the letter'.³⁴⁸

That the letter is *not* to be conceived as any kind of primeval real underlying the function of representation/symbolisation becomes further apparent where Lacan suggests that, insofar as the 'agency of the letter' is implicated in metaphor and metonymy, the letter

...easily symbolises... all the effects of signifiers, but this does absolutely not require that the letter, in these effects, for which it serves me as an instrument, should be primary. An examination is required less about this primary character, *which is not even to be supposed*, but about what in language calls the littoral to the literal.³⁴⁹ (my italics)

Finally, that the real writing of the letter is not to be conceived in naïvely materialist or metaphysical terms is also apparent where, notwithstanding his earlier testimony in *Seminar VII* (specifically, the reference to the 'sequence of *Niederschriften*' that are 'of the order of writing'), Lacan now finds fault with Freud's invocation of writing as a metaphor for facilitation: 'Writing is not an impression... [i.e., the inscribing of a 'substrate' – whether psychical or physical], despite everything that is being said in terms of a blah-blah about the famous *Wunderblock*.'³⁵⁰ On the contrary, Lacan suggests that the instance of the letter is fundamentally

...distinguished by and from the fact that it effaces... I said it in connection with the unary stroke, it is from the effacing of the stroke that the subject is designated. This is noticed then in two phases. It is necessary therefore that erasing should be distinguished from it.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ Ibid, 7.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 7-8.

³⁵⁰ Ibid, 8-9.

³⁵¹ Ibid, 12.

Lacan's allusion to the 'unary stroke' invokes his account of 'identification' as presented in *Seminar IX*. Here, the 'essence of the signifier' is related to the 'letter' or 'unary trait'. In relation to considerations of materiality, the real, and writing, this discussion is noteworthy insofar as the unary trait is posited as neither a metaphysical entity nor an expression of such but rather as a 'pure difference' or *differencing* – the functioning or expression of which, moreover, is characterised by *effacement*. That is to say, the unary trait is not apprehensible 'in itself' but, rather, must be hypothesised on the basis of 'its' effects – namely, the production of a field of differences. To this extent, the Lacanian unary trait clearly anticipates features of the Derridean trace.³⁵² Thus, with reference to Saussure's linguistics, Lacan asserts:

...unlike the sign... what distinguishes the signifier... is simply being what the others are not; that which, in the signifier, implies this function of the [linguistic] unit, is precisely to be simply difference. It is *qua* pure difference that the unit, in its signifying function, structures itself, constitutes itself.³⁵³

³⁵² The resonance between Lacan's definition of the letter/unary trait and Derrida's account of the arche-trace is apparent when one considers the commentary in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997, originally published as *De la Grammatologie*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967). Here, for example, Derrida asserts that

...the value of the transcendental arche [*archie*] must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased. The concept of arche-trace must comply with both that necessity and that erasure... The trace is not only the disappearance of origin... it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. (61)

That is to say, *as tracing*, the 'originary' writing, inculcating or enabling the field of signifiers always already is *re-tracing* – effacing itself in its very operation, thereby producing no positive presences but rather a legacy of absences, of traces.

The conception of the signifier as essentially or elementarily a self-effacing trace appears elsewhere in Lacan's writing. For example, in Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book X. Anxiety, 1962-1963*, ed. Miller, trans A.R. Price (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014, originally published as *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre X. L'angoisse, 1962-1963* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004)), 62, it is affirmed that 'The signifier... is a trace, but an effaced trace.'

³⁵³ Ibid, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 3, 29 November 1961, 26-27.

Lacan observes that this pure difference ‘is not a single trait’ (i.e., an essence) but, on the contrary, demands to be considered dialectically:

...nothing in the [signifying] function is properly speaking thinkable, unless it starts from the following which I formulate as: the one as such is the Other. It is starting from... this fundamental structure of the one as difference that we can see appearing this origin from which one can see the signifier constituting itself...³⁵⁴

Lacan then seeks to illustrate ‘in the letter precisely this essence of the signifier through which it is distinguished from the sign’ (i.e., the manner by which the signifier, in its essence, is a ‘one as difference’ or ‘pure difference’ as opposed to a ‘one’ that is, entirely and sufficiently, ‘in-itself’).³⁵⁵ The illustration takes the form of two examples of Chinese calligraphy made by Lacan himself – one, apparently, more technically accomplished than the other. As Lacan points out, the ‘two series are perfectly identifiable and at the same time they do not resemble one another at all.’ Indeed,

...it is in the clearest fashion in so far as they do not resemble one another at all that there are quite obviously from top to bottom on the right and on the left, the same seven characters, even for someone who has no idea not alone about Chinese characters, but no idea up to now that there were things which were called Chinese characters.³⁵⁶

In other words, even though they are *not* plastically identical, one readily identifies Lacan’s two series of calligraphs *with* each other – i.e., one understands that they ‘are’ or ‘mean’ the *same*. Lacan’s point is that *structures of difference* (i.e., the field of the signifier) enliven the very possibility of making *identifications* (in relation to which there emerge signifieds). Hence, Lacan contends that, fundamentally, it is the ‘one as... the Other... the one as difference’ that ‘constitutes the essence of the signifier’, which ‘in its simplest form... is... the *einzigster Zug* [single train or single trait]’ or ‘unary trait’.³⁵⁷ To

³⁵⁴ Ibid, 27.

³⁵⁵ Ibid, Seminar 4, 6 December 1961, 32.

³⁵⁶ Ibid, 32.

³⁵⁷ Ibid, 33.

appropriate and slightly modify a term Lacan employs in *Seminar I*, one also might characterise this ‘one as difference’ – the identity that is different from itself – as an ‘identity-in-difference’.³⁵⁸ As Lacan insists, further, the notion of ‘pure difference’ eludes and exceeds considerations of differences obtaining between elements in a hypothetically real, physical, or substantial, material substrate: ‘the signifier... is... that [which] introduces difference as such into the real, and precisely in the measure in that what is involved are not at all qualitative differences’.³⁵⁹ In consequence, Lacan affirms that ‘the unary trait... is the support as such of difference’.³⁶⁰

3.2.4 The figuring of painting

On the basis of the preceding discussion, it would appear that an equivalence obtains between the ‘letter’, the ‘essence of the signifier’, and the ‘unary trait’. These terms define the fundamental nature of the ‘signifying function’ (i.e., that which is implicated in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making) as an expression of ‘pure difference’ or differencing. ‘In itself’, as an expression of the structurally necessary, real-as-impossibility implicated in the function of representation/symbolisation, this differencing eludes and exceeds determination. Considered as this pure difference or differencing, the instance, agency, or insistence of the letter (i.e., *the way of being of the letter; the letter as lettering*) is thus precisely that which resists determination as an entity or even as an element of meaning. In *Seminar XVIII*, Lacan underscores this point with the following remark:

What I inscribed with the help of letters about the formations of the unconscious does not authorise making a signifier of the letter and of granting it, what is more, a primacy with regard to the signifier.³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ For a reference to Lacan’s employment of the term ‘identity in difference’ see, for example, *ibid*, *Seminar I*, 243.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 4, 6 December 1961, 35.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*, Seminar 5, 13 December 1961, 38.

³⁶¹ *Ibid*, *Seminar XVIII*, Seminar 7, 12 May 1971, 8.

This understanding of the instance of the letter permits clarification of what was previously asserted in chapter one in relation to mark-making and painting. Recall, that mark-making was proposed as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for painting: in order for the painted mark to become painting *per se* there must be a retroactive attribution of meaning. Meaning-making necessitates a prior mark-making, but these marks and their making are not, in themselves, necessarily meaningful. The attribution of meaning to mark-making merely demonstrates *after-the-fact*, as it were, the *potential-to-mean* these marks possess or excite. In light of the discussion above, however, it is apparent that the original statement of the relationship between mark-making and painting pre-supposes the physical reality or substantial, material existence of a mark-making prior to painting and on which painting depends. From Lacan's perspective, this is precisely to (1) make a signifier of the letter (i.e., lettering as mark-making constitutes the form and meaning of painting) and (2) grant the letter primacy with regard to the signifier (i.e., lettering as mark-making is *pre-requisite for* if not, indeed, the *transcendental ground of*, painting).

In order to more rigorously define the relationship between mark-making and painting, it is necessary to appreciate that, from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, subjective experience is considered to be neither simply nor immediately an effect of physically, substantially, or materially real causes to which, subsequently, meaning is attributed (i.e., the position of a naïve materialism or pragmatic realism). On the contrary, first and foremost, Lacanian psychoanalysis accords priority to subjective experience *per se* (although this experience is neither simply nor immediately that of a metaphysically grounded 'one that is conscious'). Moreover, from this perspective, Lacanian theory proposes that subjective experience *is* meaningful by definition. That is to say, in the first instance, subjective experience is neither simply nor immediately experience of a real but rather experience in and of a field of meaning. It is *from* this perspective that all hypothetical determinations of 'reality', 'physicality', 'materiality', 'causality', etc., proceed.

In consequence, all conscious determinations of subjective experience bear meaning – whether in actuality or *in potentia*. Hence, always already it is the case that what is encountered, in consciousness, *is painting* as opposed to mark-making (even if the meaning of this painting is indeterminate). That is to say, always already, there is an encounter with *marks-as-painting* or *painted marks*. These are marks of which, in consciousness, meaning *has been made* (albeit, contingent and ideal) or marks of which, in relation to the unconscious, meaning *remains to be made* (i.e., meaning that subsists/insists *in potentia*). Strictly speaking, then, always already, the question of how painting figures is posed *from the perspective of painting*. Here, what is called ‘painting’ is a field defined in accordance with the function of representation/symbolisation, within which, by virtue of *post hoc* abstractions and rationalisations, it is possible to speak of expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, and discontinuities in such, in terms of a tension between consciousness and the unconscious. Within this field of subjectivity/meaning-making, it is *not* physically or substantially real, material *marks* that are confronted, but rather *figures* (i.e., *meaningful* marks: marks of which meaning *is* in actuality or *in potentia*). In short, from the perspective of the conscious one, there is a confrontation with *signs*, in relation to which emerge signifieds or *points de capiton*.

Therefore, the question introduced in section 3.1 – namely, *how does the meaning of painting come into being?* (which is to say, the elucidation of the agent-like, metaphoric dimension of the precipitation of *points de capiton* in painted matter) – ultimately resolves into a question of how painting *figures* by virtue of a function of pure difference. This pure difference (or differencing) also is conceivable as an ‘originary’ tracing/lettering that, as an expression of a structurally necessary real-as-impossibility, is both synonymous with *and* inassimilable to representation/symbolisation. In other words, the letter/trace (i.e., the ‘essence’ of the signifier that secures the possibility of the ‘materialisation’ of the signifier) is, ‘in itself’, unfathomable and inconceivable. Within the frame of reference of the function of representation/symbolisation, lettering/tracing is an impossibility that ‘manifests’ *as* effaced, *as* excluded. In consequence, expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making evince neither differencing ‘in its essence’ nor pure

difference *per se*. Rather, the function of pure difference is that which gives rise to the trace structure or *field of differences* (i.e., the field of signifiers conceived *negatively* as differences between signifiers), on which basis is enlivened the possibility of *positively* determining a field of *different things* (i.e., objects or, to be more precise, *signs*, in relation to which emerge *signifieds*).

Here, it is important to reiterate that the signifieds in question are of the order of the ideal and the possible as opposed to the (physically) real and the actual. In light of the psychical function of repression/overdetermination, the ultimate contingency and ideality of the field of signifieds ‘overdetermined’ in consciousness is synonymous with the insistence or ‘return of repressed’ signifiers that are unconscious. Indeed, to employ Lacan’s terminology, the ‘evanescence’ of signifieds demonstrates that, in the final analysis, the imaginary determination of a field of different things ‘fades’ before an encounter with a field of differences defined by the tension obtaining between a field of forms of meaning apart from any determined meanings (i.e., the conscious dimension of the signifier) and a field of potentials (i.e., the unconscious dimension of the signifier). To recall a point made in chapter two, in Žižek’s parlance, this is the encounter with the *point de capiton* as a ‘“pure”, meaningless “signifier without the signified”’.³⁶² This is simply to emphasise that, in accordance with the function of representation/symbolisation, always already, what is apprehended in consciousness is neither purely nor absolutely formal or conceptual but rather a field of meaning/forms that *are* only insofar as they *figure* (i.e., a field of meaning/forms that *are* only *as* meaning-forming and forming-meaning: that gesture *towards* or express a *potential for* such).

³⁶² Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 97, 99.

3.3 Figuring painted matter

3.3.1 Figuring the space of meaning

Having outlined a theoretical basis for the figuring of painting in the previous two sections, it is now timely to apply this theoretical understanding to a specific example of painted matter – in this case, the figure AM I AM in *Victory over Death 2*. With reference to the questions posed in section 3.1, the aim is to clarify *in what* the ambiguous meaning of *Victory over Death 2*'s AM I AM consists (i.e., what is the form of this meaning?) and *how* it comes into this contradictory state of being (i.e., how does this meaning form?). Here, it is important to bear in mind that the figure AM I AM in *Victory over Death 2* is a *writing/painting* evincing a confluence of graphic and plastic, symbolic and pictorial. As a matter of convenience, the following discussion begins with a consideration of *Victory over Death 2*'s AM I AM as written matter that exhibits ambiguity of meaning, before proceeding onto a consideration of it as painted matter that exhibits ambiguity of form (or, to be more precise, spatial construction). However, it should be understood that, strictly speaking, these aspects are inextricably entangled. Hence, whilst it may be expedient, for example, to speak either of the grammatical ambiguity or the spatial ambiguity of the figure AM I AM, this terminology makes sense only if one recognises that, always already, grammatical ambiguity insists by virtue of a *space of meaning* and spatial ambiguity insists by virtue of a *grammar of form*.

With regard to *Victory over Death 2*'s AM I AM ambiguity of meaning, the crucial point to appreciate is that, in common with *any* posited meaning/form, *that* this sign is ambiguous simply is a consequence of the possibility of metaphorically substituting, for it, a potentially infinite number of signifying alternatives. For example, one might say that the sign 'AM I AM' *means* or *stands for* the sign 'major painted calligraphy of *Victory over Death 2*'. But is this all it means? Evidently not – at least, *in potentia*. Clearly, one might substitute, for 'major painted calligraphy of *Victory over Death 2*', 'sequence of painted words and letters', or 'group of five, large, painted forms', or 'field

of contrasts between light and dark, figure and ground, surface and depth', and so on, *ad nauseum*. The figure AM I AM means *all* these things, which is precisely to say that its meaning (like that of *any* signified emerging by virtue of a relation of identity between signs) is fundamentally ambiguous or, in Lacanian parlance, imaginary, evanescent.

Indeed, with regard to the Lacanian conception of meaning repression/overdetermination, the figure AM I AM means not *solely* by virtue of any positive determination or relation of identity – rather, these determinations or identifications are sustained by virtue of the repression of an infinity of other possible meanings. That is to say, the very possibility of the precipitation of a signified, precisely, is equivalent to the repression of an infinite and negative field of differences. By the same token, however, the inherent *ambiguity* of any emergent signified testifies to the subsistence, insistence, or *return* of that which is repressed. In consequence, the emerging signified is overdetermined and thus 'fades' before the insistence of an infinite field of meaning/forms or forms of meaning *apart from* any particular meaning (i.e., the insistence of Žižek's aforementioned 'signifier without the signified'). Relevant, in this regard, is Lacan's linguistic elaboration of the psychical function of meaning repression/overdetermination, on which basis *points de capiton* are precipitated and perpetuated in accordance with the structural laws of metaphor and metonymy. In keeping with this model, and like *any* signified, the meaning of the figure AM I AM precisely admits consideration as a *point de capiton* insofar as it defines a metonymic continuum (i.e., a combination of elements in a sequence, chain, or field) within which meaning ambiguities bear witness to traces of engendering, metaphoric stutters and discontinuities that are encountered *as* sutured into metonymy.

In light of the particular reading presented in section 3.1, the metonymic continuum in question bears interpretation as a sequence of three words 'AM', 'I', and 'AM' that, implicitly, states a question of being: 'AM I AM?' Meaning ambiguity arises insofar as this statement is self-contradictory (i.e., it seems given that, in the asking, there exists one who asks. How, then, can this one doubt its own existence?). On the basis of this reading, the figure AM I AM resists absolute determination insofar as it testifies to the

contradictory and simultaneous insistence/repression/return of *traces* of two identities implicated in its formation – namely: ‘AM I AM’ = ‘I AM’ *and* ‘AM I AM’ = ‘I AM NOT’. Here, the use of the term ‘trace’ implies that ‘what’ is repressed/returning is neither a metaphysical entity nor an expression of such. To recall Lewis’ succinct expression of this point: ‘The repressed returns in the symptom, but it returns as repressed... What returns is not *that* which is repressed, but the very event of repression itself’. Always already, insofar as they are written or spoken, the identities ‘AM I AM’ = ‘I AM’ *and* ‘AM I AM’ = ‘I AM NOT’ are objects of conscious discourse – i.e., posited signifieds. Strictly speaking, ‘that’ which is repressed/returning is the ‘pure difference’ on which basis signification is even possible. This pure difference is not any kind of ‘in itself’, ‘being’, or ‘entity’ but rather a self-effacing trace-*as*-tracing, letter-*as*-lettering. Moreover, it also is crucial to grasp that, in accordance with the function of repression/overdetermination, the figure AM I AM means, *in its ambiguity*, not *merely* by virtue of the repression/return of the traces of the identities ‘AM I AM’ = ‘I AM’ *and* ‘AM I AM’ = ‘I AM NOT’ but rather by virtue of an *infinity* of repressions and returns. *Ipso facto*, the determination of this infinite field is impossible. Hence, the question of ‘in what’ the meaning of the figure AM I AM consists is fundamentally unanswerable. Nevertheless, this state of affairs precludes neither the investigation of the *form* of this infinite field of potentials nor the manner of its *formation* – that is to say, what is proper to *figures* (meaning/forms and fields of such) and *figuring* (the activity that gives rise to meaning/forms and fields of such).

In this regard, the questions of the form and formation of the figure AM I AM in the painted matter of *Victory over Death 2* resolve into questions regarding the form of ‘what’ is repressed/returning and ‘how’ this repression/return takes place. In light of the discussion in section 3.2, it would appear that the form of what is repressed/returning is precisely *pure difference* and that the manner of repression/return is equivalent to *differencing* – i.e., the lettering/tracing implicated in the production of a field of differences (i.e., signifiers), on which basis is enlivened the possibility of determining a field of different things (i.e., determining signs, in relation to which there emerge signifieds). Always already, then, that which is encountered in consciousness is a sign

(e.g., the figure AM I AM in the painted matter of *Victory over Death 2*), in relation to which is posited a signified or *point de capiton*. Insofar as it is an effect of repression/overdetermination or pure differencing, always already, this signified is ‘fading’ before a field of differences defined by the tension obtaining between a field of forms of meaning apart from any determined meanings (i.e., the conscious dimension of the signifier) and a field of potentials (i.e., the unconscious dimension of the signifier). For the sake of convenience, and notwithstanding a certain loss of rigour, one might say that the posited signified/*point de capiton* fades before the insistence of a signifier without a signified.

As previously noted, insofar as it is an expression of pure difference or of the structurally necessary, real-as-impossibility, synonymous with, yet inassimilable to, the function of representation/symbolisation, the ‘signifier without a signified’ that, in the painted matter of *Victory over Death 2*, so insists in the fading of the signified/*point de capiton* attributed to the figure AM I AM is, precisely, that which eludes and exceeds conscious determination. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the veritable impossibility of this schema, for the sake of argument, I propose to represent/symbolise this ‘signifier without a signified’ as ‘I AM/I AM NOT’. In accordance with the terminology Lacan employs in *Seminar IX*, ‘I AM/I AM NOT’ serves to convey, inasmuch as this is possible, the manner by which ‘the essence of the signifier’ implies a ‘fundamental structure of the one as difference’ – a ‘one that is different from itself’ or, as I suggested in section 3.2, an ‘identity-in-difference’.³⁶³ Here, it should be understood that there is no question of ‘decomposing’ the figure AM I AM into ‘constituent elements’ ‘I AM’ and ‘I AM NOT’. Always already, that which is posited in consciousness is the figure AM I AM *in its meaning ambiguity*. This meaning ambiguity is equivalent to the repression/return or insistence of the signifier without a signified I AM/I AM NOT. The form of this signifier without a signified is that of an identity-in-difference or, indeed, a

³⁶³ In accordance with the discussion in section 1.1, in the identity-in-difference I AM/I AM NOT, the ambiguous joining and/or separating of the ‘/’, virgule, or retronym serves to illustrate its status as a difference-within-unity and/or a unity-that-is-differentiated.

duality insofar as it defines different aspects of a same that does not admit divisibility on the basis of this differentiation.

Here, the term ‘duality’ is somewhat ambiguous and thus demands clarification. According to some definitions, duality signifies ‘two independent principles or powers’, a ‘binary opposition’, or a ‘twofold division’. However, for the purposes of the present discussion, I propose a more restrictive qualification whereby duality is to be distinguished from divisibility *per se*.³⁶⁴ On this basis, I define that which is divisible as an assemblage of component parts where these components are able to exist independently. Duality, by contrast, refers to a same composed of different aspects such that these aspects cannot exist ‘outside of’ or ‘apart from’ this same. Hence, to suggest that the meaning ambiguity of the signified AM I AM attests to the insistence of the identity-in-difference or duality I AM/I AM NOT is precisely to affirm that AM I AM does not, on the basis of this differentiation, admit division into the components ‘I AM’ and ‘I AM NOT’. Furthermore, it is worth noting that a duality is merely the most elementary form of an identity-in-difference. In principle, nothing prevents the form of identities-in-difference being conceived in terms of multiplicities. For example, the determination of *Victory over Death 2*’s central figure as ‘I’ can be understood in terms of the repression of the threefold identity-in-difference ‘I’ / ‘1’ / ‘/’.

It may be observed that, precisely, this kind of an appeal to a duality or identity-in-difference is implicit in Lacan’s aforementioned suggestion, in *Seminar XI*, that the subject of the unconscious manifests where ‘the stroke of the opening makes absence emerge – just as the cry does not stand out against a background of silence, but on the contrary makes the silence emerge as silence.’ The implication is that, prior to the utterance of the cry, there is neither cry nor silence: in accordance with the function of representation/symbolisation, these categories emerge in the form of an indissoluble duality *cry/silence*. The manner by which, retrospectively, ‘cry’ and ‘silence’ may appear to exist and mean independently exemplifies the contingency and idealisation attending

³⁶⁴ In this regard, I should acknowledge that my that my thinking the difference between ‘duality’ and ‘divisibility’ is indebted to the distinction made between ‘a divided unity and a duality’ in Johnson, 472.

the positing of signifieds and, in consequence, the tendency to imagine that things are and mean in and of themselves. However, on the basis of the repression/return of the duality or identity-in-difference cry/silence, these determinations are sustained only insofar as, always already, they are fading (i.e., becoming ambiguous).

In accordance with the function of representation/symbolisation, the experience of the ambiguous figure AM I AM in the painted matter of *Victory over Death 2*, precisely, implies a repression/return of the duality 'opening stroke'/'ground'. The term duality applies insofar as, clearly, it is nonsensical to suggest that the painted matter of *Victory over Death 2* involves, for example, *combining* 'strokes' and 'grounds' – as if these were discrete 'elements' enjoying a prior and independent existence. On the contrary, it is evident that the 'differends' in question cannot exist *apart from* their relations of difference. The indissoluble and irreducible nature of this identity-in-difference is readily illustrated. On the canvas support of McCahon's painting, a dense structure of brushstrokes traces the letters 'AM I AM'. In consciousness, one determines these strokes or tracings as substantially 'real' or 'material' things. However, this is not to imply that they can exist *apart from* the relationships of difference between individual brushstrokes, and between the brushstrokes and the canvas ground, by virtue of which the letters are materialised.

This may not be immediately obvious. Let us simplify matters and imagine that the letters of the figure AM I AM are the products of single strokes deposited by a broad brush. Is it not, then, conceivable that, once dry, the letters might be peeled away from the support – in a manner similar to the removal of a layer of tempera pigment in fresco conservation? In this event, one might be forgiven for thinking that the letters of the figure AM I AM are determinable as real, material 'things-in-themselves'. On reflection, however, this is, evidently, *not* the case. The possibility of discriminating the letters 'AM I AM' continues to depend on relations of difference. For example, a relation of difference now obtains between the 'detached' letters and a more general background space or environment. Indeed, in the very act of peeling pigment from a support, does not a relation of difference insist between the material film of detached paint and the tactile

surface of one's fingers? This simple example demonstrates how misleading is the metaphysical notion of an isolable 'thing-in-itself'. In accordance with the psychical function of repression/overdetermination or pure difference, any determination of the meaning of an entity or a figure (i.e., a sign) is destined to fade before the insistence of structures of traces, relations of difference, signifiers without signifieds.

3.3.2 Figuring the grammar of form

Given that the precipitation of a signified or *point de capiton* implies the repression/return of an infinite field of differences, it should be clear that the particular duality or identity-in-difference I AM/I AM NOT is only one of an infinity of possibilities from which one might choose in seeking to characterise the insistent signifier without a signified implicated in the fading of the signified or *point de capiton* of the figure AM I AM.³⁶⁵ Moreover, in seeking to illustrate some of these possibilities, one ought not to be constrained by the apparently *linguistic* tenor of the preceding discussion, on which basis, at the expense of the *plastic* or *pictorial*, there has been a privileging of the *graphic* or *symbolic* aspects of the figure AM I AM in the painted matter of *Victory over Death 2*. Indeed, in the present context, it should be apparent that, in so privileging/determining the figure AM I AM *as* graphic/symbolic, among the infinity of differences repressed are those which might be characterised (i.e., privileged, determined *in turn*) *as* plastic/pictorial.

By way of clarifying this point, consider, for example, what is implicit in determining the central element of the figure AM I AM as 'I'. Recalling the discussion in chapter one, it should be apparent that, in so doing, one represses an infinity of other possibilities. Some of these may seem 'primarily' graphic or symbolic – e.g., 'I', '/'. Others may seem 'primarily' plastic or pictorial – e.g., 'erect figure in a landscape', 'inner city roofs', 'waterfall', 'fall of light', 'barrier', 'portal', or 'gate'. However, the degree to which priority is accorded to 'graphic/symbolic' or 'plastic/pictorial' is, itself, a determination

³⁶⁵ In this regard, it should be appreciated that this infinity of possibilities would constitute an identity-in-difference with the form of an infinite *multiplicity* as opposed to a mere *duality*.

that involves repressions and which, in accordance with the return of the repressed, is fading. To the extent figures determined as ‘purely’ graphic/symbolic or ‘purely’ plastic/pictorial *are* ambiguous, they testify to the insistence of identities-in-difference or dualities of the form *graphic/plastic, symbolic/pictorial, writing/painting*. This is simply to reiterate that, in consciousness, the nature of the insistent signifier without a signified is, fundamentally, to be a *meaning/form* – a duality or identity-in-difference of the symbolic and the representational. In consequence, the meaning-forming or figuring of AM I AM in the painted matter of *Victory over Death 2* emerges as an inextricable entanglement of plastic and graphic, pictorial and symbolic, painting and writing.

Therefore, and notwithstanding the limitations inherent to this endeavour, in seeking to more fully elaborate the figuring of *Victory over Death 2*’s AM I AM (i.e., to illustrate other possibilities for the form of the insistent signifier without a signified implicated in the fading of the signified or *point de capiton* of the figure AM I AM), one might observe, for example, that its ambiguity extends beyond its grammatical construction (i.e., the graphic/symbolic) and also, in fact, encompasses its spatial construction (i.e., the plastic/pictorial). From this perspective, the ambiguity intrinsic to *Victory over Death 2*’s AM I AM may be just as validly attributed to the insistence of an identity-in-difference like ‘surface/depth’ as of ‘I AM/I AM NOT’. In this regard, however, it is crucial to appreciate that there is *no* suggestion that ‘surface/depth’ is ‘purely’ ‘formal/plastic/painting’ and ‘I AM/I AM NOT’ is ‘purely’ ‘conceptual/symbolic/writing’. At risk of belabouring the point, always already, the determinations ‘formal/plastic/painting’ and ‘conceptual/symbolic/writing’ are, themselves, sustained on the basis of repressions such that they evince ambiguity and fade before the return of that which is repressed – namely, aforementioned identities-in-difference such as *graphic/plastic, symbolic/pictorial, writing/painting*. Hence, the suggestion that, in the painted matter of *Victory over Death 2*, the ambiguity of the figure AM I AM is an effect of the insistence of an infinite field of identities-in-difference encompassing ‘I AM/I AM NOT’ and ‘surface/depth’ is precisely *not* to assert that there are isolable ambiguities of meaning and isolable ambiguities of form. Still less is it to suggest that meaning ambiguities are grounded in essences of form or that formal

ambiguities are grounded in essences of meaning. To reiterate the point made at the outset of this discussion, whilst it may be convenient to speak either of the grammatical ambiguity or the spatial ambiguity of the figure AM I AM, this terminology makes sense only if one recognises that, always already, grammatical ambiguity insists by virtue of a *space of meaning* and spatial ambiguity insists by virtue of a *grammar of form*.

By way of providing an illustration, let us examine the insistence of the identity-in-difference ‘surface/depth’ in the painted matter of *Victory over Death 2* and the manner by which this contributes to the ambiguity of the painting’s major calligraphy. What is relevant, in this regard, is that, in the initial encounter with *Victory over Death 2*, one may neglect to notice that there is anything beyond the billboard-like disposition of light-toned letters and words on a flat surface, uniformly painted matt black. That is to say, one makes determinations such as ‘light-toned letters and words’, ‘flat surface painted matt black’. These determinations are sustained on the basis of an infinity of repressions (e.g., identities-in-difference such as light/dark, painting/writing, surface/depth, figure/ground, pictorial/symbolic, plastic/graphic, etc.). In light of the return of the repressed, always already, these determinations are fading (i.e., they are determined only in their meaning ambiguity). In coming to recognise this ambiguity (i.e., in effect, to make further determinations sustained by further repressions) one may observe that, in several places, dark areas of the support are populated with cloudy masses and other understated forms. These features invest the painting with an illusory depth: dark, flat surfaces being transformed into atmospheric voids.

In *Victory over Death 2*, these misty, blue-grey masses are particularly prominent in the gap between the leftward AM and the central I, and above the right half of the M chevron located at the extreme right of the painting. Nevertheless, to the extent that these indistinct masses are typically juxtaposed with, if not over-painted by, more sharply defined blocks of text, intimations of atmospheric space evidently exist in an ambiguous counterpoise with reaffirmations of the two-dimensionality of the painted surface. In *Victory over Death 2*, for example, the misty region occupying the space between the leftward AM and central I is mostly obscured with script citing John 12: 28 and 12: 35.

These textual superimpositions seem disposed on flat, transparent surfaces through which the spectator gazes into an implied background space. The effect is precisely analogous to McCahon's well-known recollection of seeing the letters 'HAIRDRESSER AND TOBACCONIST' being painted on a shop window.³⁶⁶ However, still further inspection reveals that, in themselves, these blocks of painted calligraphy also give rise to spatial ambiguities. The impression that they are traced on surfaces akin to flat panes of glass is undermined by subtle inflexions in paint tone, density and definition (not to mention variations in font size and case – particularly obvious in a work like *Practical Religion*). The relative uniformity of the printed, block capitals from John 12: 28 reinforces the impression that it defines a surface, whilst the more overtly handwritten text from John 12: 35 evidently constitutes a calculus of variations in tonal brightness, degrees of transparency and opacity, and letters whose delineation ranges from well-defined to fuzzy around the edges. In consequence, the impression of cursive script, handwritten on a transparent page, tends to be superseded by a sense of letters and words suspended in space – scintillating like starlight glimpsed through a turbulent atmosphere or swimming like reflections viewed on an undulating water surface.

This spatial ambiguity is also manifest in the treatment of *Victory over Death 2*'s major text. The placement and delineation of the capital letters in the picture space, combined with variations in tonal brightness, enlivens a variety of conflicting spatial cues. In the first place, in both renditions of the word AM, the M slightly overlaps the A. This immediately creates the impression that the letters are disposed on superimposed planes. Moreover, it is also apparent that the AM at left is positioned somewhat lower in the picture space than its rightward counterpart. In particular, the horizontal bar of the leftward A is significantly lower than that of the corresponding letter at the right of the work. Given that the legs of the leftward AM extend to the bottom edge of the painting and that the right leg of the M, occupying the far right extremity of the work, traverses the height of the canvas support in its entirety, the delineation of the figure AM I AM evidently defines either a gentle diagonal across the surface of the work or, alternatively, a succession of superimposed planes proceeding from lower left background to upper

³⁶⁶ McCahon, 'Beginnings, 10. Colin McCahon,' 361.

right foreground. The tonal variance between the barely visible AM at left and the relatively illuminated I AM at centre-right reinforces the sense of a transition in depth from background shadow to foreground illumination.

However, this impression of letter-forms disposed, in depth, on a series of superimposed planes, also miscarries. For example, in relation to the right-hand AM, the boundary where the letters overlap is not well-defined but subject to various edge effects that undermine the sense of their planar separation. Indeed, at one point, the lower-right extremity of the A breaks into the adjacent M. Tonally, moreover, the figure AM I AM does not unfold in a linear progression from near-darkness to a radiant crescendo. On the contrary, the brightest letter is the centrally located I. The following A and M are rendered in progressively darker hues. Hence, if tonal brightness correlates with spatial proximity then, in contraindication of other spatial cues, the figure AM I AM would appear to balloon outward towards the spectator – as if seen through a fish-eye lens located over the central I. That the girth of the white lozenge defining *Victory over Death* 2's middle I exceeds the constituent geometries of the other major capitals reinforces the impression that it occupies a locus of maximal magnification. These spatial conundrums are further exacerbated in the figure of the rightmost M. Reversing the treatment of its left-hand counterpart, the left leg of the right-hand M is markedly thicker than its right leg. This tends to contradict the impression that the letter is proceeding towards the spectator – rather, its rightward segment seems to twist back into depth. However, this twisting back is, itself, countermanded by the fact that the right leg of the M defines the rightmost boundary of the canvas support. Hence, any impression of a turning into depth is abruptly forestalled in a blunt reiteration of the painted surface. In a fashion redolent of the tendency of cubist paintings to mix perspectives and spatial cues, *Victory over Death* 2's right-hand capital constitutes a visual paradox: at once, 'coming' and 'going', it warps into an implied interior space and reasserts the two-dimensionality of the picture plane.

Insofar as this formal discordance invites interpretation in terms of a focus that continuously shifts between apprehensions of dark and light, background and foreground,

depth and surface, one is reminded of Lacan's account of the manifestation of the subject of the unconscious as a 'discontinuity in which something is manifested as a vacillation.' Nevertheless, given Lacan's understanding that the insistent 'signifier without a signified' is constituted as a 'one as difference' or an identity-in-difference, it should be emphasised that the impression of spatial ambiguity in the painted matter of *Victory over Death 2* is, strictly speaking, less a matter of swift alternations or vacillations between discrete, isolable elements and perspectives than the experience of their paradoxical simultaneity. Hence, one only *imagines* that *Victory over Death 2*'s AM I AM inculcates a confusion of, or wavering between, dark background and illuminated foreground, shadowy depth and radiant surface – as if dark and light, background and foreground, depth and surface might enjoy independent existence. Always already, however, these determinations are fading before the return of that which is repressed – an infinite field of pure differences in which there insists an infinity of letterings or tracings, identities-in-difference or trace structures: *light/dark, foreground/background, surface/depth, proximity/distance, presence/absence, substance/void, being/non-being, I AM/I AM NOT...*

As a final note, I would point out that it cannot be sufficiently emphasised that, considered as an expression of the structurally necessary, real-as-impossibility implicated in the function of representation/symbolisation, the infinite field of pure differences in question fundamentally exceeds and eludes this function, even as it is synonymous with it. Hence, the proffered list of identities-in-difference must be regarded as merely illustrative or schematic. One might seek, 'more precisely', to represent/symbolise this infinite field of pure differences by (1) interposing retronyms between *all* these terms and (2) placing the terms in brackets or quotation marks so as to emphasise their contingency and ideality. On this basis, the phrase above might be represented/symbolised like so: 'light' / 'dark' / 'foreground' / 'background' / 'surface' / 'depth' / 'proximity' / 'distance' / 'presence' / 'absence' / 'substance' / 'void' / 'being' / 'non-being' / 'I AM' / 'I AM NOT' / '...' Indeed, given that the terms in quotes are, necessarily and inevitably, posited signifieds (i.e., contingent and ideal, always already fading) one may be tempted to dispense with them altogether, leaving only a field of retronyms and ellipses: ... / ... / ...

/ ... This illustrates how the content or meaning of one's constructions tends to fade in the face of an insistence of that which is more purely formal – which is precisely to reiterate that the fading of the signified is commensurate with the insistence of the 'signifier without the signified'. Also evident is that the repeated effort to represent/symbolise that which exceeds and eludes the function of representation/symbolisation is swiftly marked by diminishing returns, faltering in the face of its own impossibility.

Let us summarise the preceding discussion. The present chapter has sought to answer the question *how does the meaning of painting come into being?* by way of an elaboration of the 'agent-like', *metaphoric* dimension of the *precipitation* of *points de capiton* in painting – which I have termed the *figuring of painting*. Appealing to Lacanian theory, I have characterised figuring as a meaning-forming and forming-meaning that is synonymous with a psychical function of meaning repression/overdetermination or pure difference. In consequence, I have observed that, in consciousness, all signifieds/*points de capiton* emerge only insofar as they are fading (i.e., becoming ambiguous) before the 'return of the repressed' or the 'insistence' of the 'signifier without a signified'. Here, however, one encounters an evident difficulty. If it is the case that, in figuring meaning, *points de capiton* are precipitated only insofar as they are *fading* then how is one to understand what, in *Seminar III*, Lacan refers to as the 'big Other of intersubjectivity... the stable system of the world' – i.e., the experience of what appears to be an enduring, language-mediated, social and cultural reality? Transposing this problem into the field of painting, one confronts the following question: *how is the meaning of painting sustained?* As indicated in section 3.1, chapter four presents the following hypothesis: namely, that the meaning of painting is sustained by virtue of the 'automatist', *metonymic* dimension of the *perpetuation* of *points de capiton* in painting – which may be called the *desire of painting*. In other words, there is a twofold proposition such that (1) the meaning of painting (or, indeed, any expression of subjectivity/meaning-making) is perpetuated as automatist, metonymic, re-playing of existing meaning, and (2) this automatism, metonymy and repetition expresses the structure of subjective desire.

Here, it should be apparent that if *difference* is the concept crucial to understanding the agent-like, metaphoric, *precipitation* of *points de capiton* in painting then *repetition* is the analogously critical concept for understanding their automatist, metonymic, *perpetuation*. Thus, if the *point de capiton* is metaphorically precipitated in painting by virtue of the function of metaphor-as-pure differencing (i.e., *figuring*) then the *point de capiton* is metonymically perpetuated in painting by virtue of the function of metonymy-as-repetition (i.e., *desire*). In order to more fully elaborate these ideas, the following matters demand consideration. In section 4.1, it will be necessary, firstly, to specify in what senses metonymy is *repetition*. In section 4.2, I will apply this understanding to the painted matter of *Painting from "Malady"* and the *Malady* series in order to illustrate how they admit consideration as signs of metonymy-as-repetition that evince, so to speak, two 'moments' of repetition. Finally, in section 4.3, I will explore the Lacanian proposition that 'desire is a metonymy' in order to justify the appellation *desire* for that which sustains meaning (of painting or, indeed, any expression of language-mediated subjectivity) as automatism, metonymy, repetition.

Chapter 4 The desire of painting

4.1 Metonymy: meaning the same again

4.1.1 Metonymy as repetition

How is metonymy repetition? Let us approach this question by way of recalling the brief encounter with Jakobson's linguistics presented in chapter two. On this basis, metonymy may be defined as the manner by which 'Any sign is made up of constituent signs and/or only occurs in combination with other signs' so that

...any linguistic unit at one and the same time serves as a context for simpler units and/or finds its own context in a more complex linguistic unit. Hence any actual grouping of linguistic units binds them into a superior unit: combination and contexture are two faces of the same operation.³⁶⁷

Metonymy, therefore, defines the way in which signs can be understood as collective combinations of component signs *and* as building blocks for aggregate signs. For example, 'words' are signs assembled from component signs (i.e., syllables, letters, phonemes) that can be combined with other words to produce semiotic agglomerations (i.e., clauses, sentences, paragraphs, entire texts, etc.). To reiterate another key point made in chapter two, metonymic combination and contexture of signs implies that 'the' meaning of 'a' sign determined in consciousness defines the crystallisation and/or reconfiguration of a *field* of meaning or, equivalently, the assumption of a particular perspective on a 'world'. This is simply to reaffirm that any (necessarily, conscious) determination of meaning emerges in the form of a relation of tension with a potentially infinite *field* of meaning/forms (i.e., the big Other, symbolic order, signifying chain), the greater part of which is, practically speaking, repressed and, therefore, unconscious.

In order to demonstrate how metonymy is repetition, it is necessary to reiterate that, from a Lacanian perspective, metonymy defines the combinational ordering of the signifying chain in terms of the *tension* obtaining between a synchronic constellation of

³⁶⁷ Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', 60.

signifiers-as-potentials that are unconscious and a diachronic sequence of signifiers-as-meaning/forms unfolding in consciousness. To put the matter equivalently, the tension between the conscious and the unconscious ‘dimensions’ of the signifying chain bears witness to the manner by which a synchronic metonymy that is unconscious metaphorically *becomes* as a diachronic metonymy in consciousness. In relation to expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, this becoming is synonymous with what has been termed the ‘structuring of structure’. In chapter two, this idea was invoked in the context of a discussion addressing Lacan’s conception of *das Ding* as ‘the beyond-of-the-signified’ or ‘the Thing’ in its ‘dumb reality’ – i.e., as an expression of the real. In chapter three, the aspect of *structuring* was prioritised in the elaboration of the *figuring* of painting – where, as previously discussed, *figuring* was defined, variously, in terms of the metaphoric function of *pure difference* proper to the operation of the unary trait, lettering/tracing/differencing, a real writing or writing in the real, the insistence of the signifier without the signified, and the return of the repressed. In its elaboration of the *desire* of painting, the present chapter prioritises the aspect of *structure*. That is to say, the *form* of conscious diachrony where, in accordance with the metonymic function, there unfolds an iterative series of signs within which sutured or subsumed metaphoric discontinuities testify to the insistent *becoming* or *return* of a repressed ‘structure’ or ‘field’ of signifiers-as-potentials that are unconscious.

In this regard, I would suggest that metonymy is conceivable as repetition in a threefold sense. In the first place, by virtue of what has been termed, variously, the ‘function of repression/overdetermination of meaning’, ‘structuring of structure’, the ‘reciprocity of metaphoric and metonymic functions’, the insistent ‘return of the repressed’, and so forth, consciousness simply *is* diachronic metonymy. That is to say, consciousness or conscious discourse simply *is* the repetitive, serial positing of signs – this activity being synonymous with the repetitive, serial, determining of the field of meaning or assuming perspectives on the world. Equivalently, conscious diachrony, defined as the serial determination of signs, may be understood in terms of a movement among *semiotic identities* or *signifying alternatives*. Here, the understanding of consciousness *as* diachronic metonymy may merit further explanation. In accordance

with the Lacanian proposition that expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making are governed by the laws of metaphor and metonymy, I have suggested that subjective experience bears witness to a *structuring of structure* – a metaphoric function of pure difference or lettering/tracing/differencing, by virtue of which a synchronic metonymy of signifiers-as-potentials that is unconscious metaphorically *becomes* as a diachronic metonymy (i.e., a sequence of signs) in consciousness. To this extent, one may conceive of subjective experience in terms of a continual series of (hidden) metaphoric precipitations that occur in concert with a similarly continual series of reconfigurations of the metonymic structure (i.e., the *becoming* of unconscious metonymy *as* conscious metonymy). Moment by moment, then, the metonymic structure *is as* continually being reconfigured and, therefore, *is as* continually becoming different from itself. This counterpoise of metaphor and metonymy is precisely equivalent to what has been called the insistent return of the repressed, the insistence of an identity-in-difference or, to anticipate matters addressed in section 4.3, desire as significant insistence.

The idea that there is a *becoming* of unconscious metonymy *as* conscious metonymy resonates with Lacan's assertion, in *Seminar I*, that the 'identity in difference... already saturated in the thing' implies 'absolute mobility in the existence of things such that the flow of the world never comes to pass twice by in the same situation' and that, furthermore, the unconscious

...is located outside time... because it is in itself time, the pure time of the thing, and as such it can reproduce the thing within a certain modulation, whose material support can be anything. The compulsion to repeat involves nothing but this.³⁶⁸

Here, I would suggest that Lacan's definition of the unconscious as the 'pure time of the thing' (i.e., 'real temporality') resonates with conceptions of temporality in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (e.g., the conception of 'time-consciousness' in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time 1893-1917* (1991 (1966)) and Heidegger (e.g., the notion of *ekstasis* in *Being and Time* (1927)) – a more nuanced elaboration of which is beyond the scope of the present study. What is crucial is the

³⁶⁸ Lacan, *Seminar I*, 243. This passage also is discussed in section 8.4.

distinction obtaining between the unconscious, considered as ‘pure time’ or ‘real temporality’, and the ‘abstract’ notion of time as it is conceived in consciousness. The unconscious as pure time would appear to be synonymous with that which reflects the function of pure difference or the lettering/tracing/differencing proper to the operation of the unary trait. Hence, the unconscious, as temporally structured, precisely, is that which is repressed/returning in consciousness and, thus, fundamentally escapes the grasp of consciousness. Consciousness does not take cognizance of temporality in its essence, so to speak (i.e., as the continual becoming of difference), but rather admits consideration as a series of ‘snapshots’ or ‘samples’ of this becoming – where this *seriality* (i.e., the difference between ‘snapshots’) is that which is repressed/returning. Each snapshot (equivalent to a determination of meaning that, retroactively, bears witness to a complete reconfiguration of the field of meaning) constitutes a model of reality or perspective on a world that, in accordance with the idealisations and rationalisations of consciousness, presents (however momentarily) as necessary, inevitable, normal and natural.

The second sense of metonymy-as-repetition obtains insofar as, by virtue of metonymic combination and contexture, any determined field of meaning or perspective on the world is a sign that admits decomposition into combinations of simpler signs and integration into more complex semiotic ensembles. Among these combinations and within these contexts, there obtain relations of similarity and difference between signs. In other words, within any particular semiotic ensemble, it is always possible to determine the repetition of a same – albeit, a same sustained only by virtue of the repression of difference and thus, in light of the return of the repressed difference, a same that is, always already, fading. For example, by way of anticipating the discussion in the following section, one might say that the sign ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ means by virtue of a semiotic identity such as ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ = ‘sanguineous annulus’. Insofar as the sign ‘sanguineous annulus’ can be understood as a combination of identical arc segments, it defines a field in which there is a reiteration of the same. On this basis, one may say that the sign ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ means by virtue of the semiotic identity ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ = ‘repetition of the *same* ring arc’. At the same time, however, the determination that there *is* a repetition of the same ring arc is sustained on the basis of

a repression of difference (e.g., ring arcs of different lengths, ring arcs of different spatial orientation, ring arcs of different painterly execution, and so on). The return of these repressed differences ensures that the semiotic identities '*Painting from "Malady"*' = 'sanguineous annulus' or '*Painting from "Malady"*' = 'repetition of the *same* ring arc' are sustained only insofar as they are fading/subject to ambiguity.

As a further example that anticipates the discussion in the third part of the thesis, one might say, similarly, that the sign 'Hotere discourse' means by virtue of a semiotic identity such as 'Hotere discourse' = 'the figure of Hotere's reticence'. Insofar as the sign 'the figure of Hotere's reticence' can be understood as a combination of texts in which there is reference made to 'Hotere's reticence', it defines a field in which there is a reiteration of the same. On this basis, one may say that the sign 'Hotere discourse' means by virtue of the semiotic identity 'Hotere discourse' = 'repetition of references to the *same* figure of Hotere's reticence'. At the same time, however, the determination that there *is* a repetition of the same figure of Hotere's reticence is sustained on the basis of a repression of difference (e.g., the many different ways in which the figure of Hotere's reticence is articulated in different texts). The return of these repressed differences ensures that the semiotic identities 'Hotere discourse' = 'the figure of Hotere's reticence' or 'Hotere discourse' = 'repetition of references to the *same* figure of Hotere's reticence' are sustained only insofar as they are fading/subject to ambiguity.

The third sense of metonymy-as-repetition is more subtle and reflects the manner by which, from the perspective of consciousness, always already it is the case that particular determinations of meaning *are as reiterated*. To see how this is so, it may be useful to recall what was previously suggested in relation to the precipitation and perpetuation of *points de capiton*. Namely, that the (structurally synchronic/metaphoric) 'moment' of the 'precipitation' of meaning is a (structurally diachronic/metonymic) function of both the *anticipation* and *retroactive determination* of meaning. Relevant, in this regard, is Lacan's observation (in *Seminar III*) that 'in the order of signifiers... [in] the continuity of the signifier... A signifying unit presupposes the completion of a certain circle that

situates its different elements.’³⁶⁹ Also noteworthy is Lacan’s aforementioned suggestion (in *Seminar V*) that posited signifieds involve ‘an anticipation of the signifying succession, every signifying chain opening out before it the horizon of its own completion, and at the same time... a retroaction, once there has come naturally the signifying term which... overtakes the sentence’.³⁷⁰ In consequence, it *seems* as if the metonymic, diachronic dimension of discourse is impelled towards that which it *has already been*. With the precipitation of meaning, and thus, retroactively, the complete reconfiguration of the field of meaning, that which was, formerly, anticipated is normalised and naturalised, taking on the appearance of necessity and inevitability. In other words, as Lacan suggests in the ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter” ’, expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making define a ‘subjective trajectory... grounded in the actuality which has the future anterior as its present.’³⁷¹ From this perspective, meaning admits consideration as that which precipitates *as* perpetuated or crystallises *as* that which *will be what it was*. Always already, *meaning*, which is to say, the emergent signified or *point de capiton*, is only insofar as *it is again*.

Here, it may be objected that subjective experience of a world that admits unpredictable novelty and change would seem to contradict the proposition that meaning precipitates *as* perpetuated or *is* only insofar as *it is again*. By way of responding to this objection, it is necessary to reiterate that determinations of meaning are a function of consciousness (even if, as previously suggested, consciousness, the unconscious, and their relation of tension demand, in effect, to be conceived as abstractions from what is ‘primary’ – namely, language-mediated, subjective experience *per se*). Insofar as the making sense or meaning-that-is-made of subjective experience is a function of consciousness, it is subject to all the idealisations and rationalisations of consciousness. The proposition that meaning precipitates *as* perpetuated or *is* only insofar as *it is again* is intended to emphasise how, by virtue of these idealisations and rationalisations, the

³⁶⁹ Ibid, *Seminar III*, 263.

³⁷⁰ Ibid, *Seminar V*, Seminar 27, 25 June 1958, 356.

³⁷¹ Ibid, ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter” ’, 37.

determinations of consciousness (which include the fabrication of a world that witnesses change, novelty, etc.) are imbued with a seeming necessity, inevitability, normalcy and naturalness. This holds true for any conscious determination whatsoever – even determinations of uncertainty or incapacity. Always already, *qua determination*, the determinations of consciousness are endowed with a quotient of positivity. It is the case that, by virtue of the ‘hidden’ and ‘self-effacing’ nature of what has been called the ‘metaphoric function’ (i.e., unconscious meaning-in-the-making), the precise moment of the precipitation of meaning can only ever be hypothesised after the fact – which is to reaffirm that, from a Lacanian perspective, the one that is conscious is never precisely coincident with or fully present to itself. Nevertheless, the positive dimension of conscious determinations of meaning (however imaginary or ideal) implies that a statement of the form ‘there is uncertainty’ is always amenable to being modified thus: ‘on reflection, it is certain that there was uncertainty’. The nature of consciousness is such that, whilst there may be determinations that the world is uncertain, *that* determinations are made is not in doubt. Indeed, given the Lacanian understanding of subjective experience as a ‘trajectory... grounded in the actuality which has the future anterior as its present’, the conscious determination that ‘on reflection, it is certain there was uncertainty’ admits the more precise formulation: ‘always already it will have been the case that, on reflection, it is certain that there was uncertainty’.

In consciousness, then, always already it is the case that meaning registers *as* repeated. Recalling points made previously, this is to reaffirm that the *event* of the metaphoric crystallisation of *points de capiton* is ‘hidden’ – entirely subsumed within the *appearance* of a perpetual, metonymic *re*-playing of existing meaning. In consequence, any emergent signified or *point de capiton* admits consideration as an expression of an ‘agent-like’ and metaphoric operation of pure difference *and* as an expression of an ‘automatist’ and metonymic operation of repetition. In the face of the insistent ‘return of the repressed’, necessarily and inevitably, the signified precipitates *as fading* and *as reiterated* – which is precisely to say that the signified is ‘sustained’ only *in its meaning ambiguity*. Still further, this is also to reemphasise that, in the final analysis, the *point de capiton*, metaphorically precipitated *as fading* and metonymically perpetuated *as* endlessly

reiterated, is *not* ‘a’ signified or ‘determinate’ meaning/form but, on the contrary, an insistent ‘signifier without a signified’ – a form of meaning apart from any particular meaning. Hence, one may conclude that, in the diachronic unfolding of discourse, ultimately, ‘that’ which is perpetuated or which repeats is nothing other than the discontinuous *form* of repression/return, insistence/fading: conscious discourse is a continuum of sutured discontinuities within which all meaning-that-is-made fades before endlessly insistent forms of meaning-in-the-making.

4.1.2 Identity and difference

In accordance with the function of repression/overdetermination of meaning, the manner by which meaning is *as fading* and *as reiterated* also admits consideration in terms of a paradoxical simultaneity of identity and difference. This follows from the definition of repetition as the reiteration of a same *that is not identical with itself*. At the very least, to repeat is to return at a later (i.e., *different*) time. Always already, then, this irreducible, temporal difference implies that, in returning, *the same is becoming different from itself*. This is precisely to affirm that, in accordance with the psychical function of repression/overdetermination, the *same* that returns in repetition is sustained – indeed, overdetermined – by virtue of the repression/return of *difference*. In *Seminar IX*, this conception of repetition is evident from Lacan’s discussion of the contradictions inherent in the so-called Law of Identity: $A = A$. Lacan points out that whilst ‘“A is A” appears to mean something: it makes a “signified” (*cela fait “signifié”*)’, at the same time, ‘“A is A” signifies nothing’ where ‘It is precisely this nothing (*rien*) that is going to be in question, because this nothing has a positive value because it says what that signifies.’³⁷² In other words, even though, by virtue of the redundant repetition of ‘A’, the identity ‘ $A = A$ ’ is, ostensibly, empty or meaningless, nevertheless, it accrues a positive quotient of meaning insofar as (1) ‘meaning nothing’ is still, minimally, *meaning* ‘nothing’ and (2) ‘meaning nothing’ implies that, in some sense, ‘nothing’ *means* (i.e., ‘nothing’ ‘exerts’ a signifying effect).

³⁷² Ibid, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 4, 6 December 1961, 28.

Lacan illustrates this latter point by repeatedly flourishing and hiding a ping-pong ball, thereby pantomiming what he refers to as the ‘inaugural gesture’ in the game of *Fort-Da* played by Freud’s grandson.³⁷³ Lacan’s point is that identifications (i.e., significations, the making of meanings *per se*) are sustained by virtue of the difference between appearance and disappearance, presence and absence, something and nothing. The assertion that something appears, something is present, something *is*, depends on the possibility of something being disappeared, something being absent, something *being not*. In other words, the *difference* between being and being not is structurally necessary for successive manifestations of a *same* such that one may sustain an identity of the form $A = A$: namely, ‘the ping-pong ball is the ping-pong ball’...this little o is a little o.’³⁷⁴ Still further, Lacan proposes that

...there is between these two moments, which I indisputably identify in a legitimate fashion, the disappearance of the ball; without that there is no means for me to show it, there is nothing formed on the plane of the image. Therefore, the ball is always there and I can fall into a cataleptic state looking at it.³⁷⁵

Here, I would suggest that the assertion that ‘the ball is always there’ and that one can ‘fall into a cataleptic state looking at it’ implies that, always already, identifications bear witness to a condition of entranced catalepsy. That is to say, identification *is* an automatism (i.e., an *effect* of the function of representation/symbolisation or what, in

³⁷³ For references to the game of *Fort-Da* (gone-there) played by Freud’s grandson, see Freud, ‘The Interpretation of Dreams (second part)’ (1900), in SE, v5, 461, n1 (added 1919), and *ibid*, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ (1920) in SE, v18, 14-17.

³⁷⁴ Lacan, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 4, 6 December 1961, 28-29. In this context, Lacan’s reference to ‘little o’ is an allusion to the ‘object of desire’. However, the ‘o’ originally derives from ‘other’ (or, in French, ‘*autre*’ – hence the equivalent rendering of the object of desire as ‘little *a*’ or, indeed, in *Seminar XI* and later, ‘*objet petit a*’ – the so-called ‘object cause of desire’). The reference to the other reflects the fact that little o (or little *a*) was originally employed to designate ‘small other’ – i.e., the ego and its mirror image. Little o as object of desire will merit further attention in section 4.3.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 29.

section 4.3, will be referred to as significant insistence) – even if, on the level of consciousness and ego, identification would seem to exemplify agency.

Lacan then enquires into the nature of the ‘is’ ‘which unites the apparitions of the ball and this intervening disappearance’ and suggests that it is sustained ‘On the imaginary plane...[in] this spontaneous assumption by the subject of the identity of two appearances which are nevertheless quite different.’ That is to say, as previously suggested, identity is sustained by virtue of the repression of difference. In order to explain how it is possible for signification to arise through the difference between appearance and disappearance, presence and absence, something and nothing, Lacan contends that it is necessary to transcend the order of imaginary idealisations of meaning and

...question... the relationship of... identification... with what is a different dimension to everything that is the order appearance and disappearance; namely the status of the signifier.³⁷⁶

To this extent, Lacan’s allusions to the ‘nothing’ that, paradoxically, ‘exerts’ signifying effects, and the ‘inaugural’ role of the signifier in enabling the possibility of making identifications, prefigure his elaboration of the ‘essence’ of the signifier in terms of the unary trait. As previously discussed in chapter three, the status of the signifier, in its ‘essence’, so to speak, is to be as a ‘one as difference’ or ‘identity-in-difference’. That which ‘materialises’ the signifier as an identity-in-difference is the metaphoric function of pure difference – the lettering/tracing/differencing that, as structurally necessary, real-as-impossibility, is synonymous with, yet inassimilable to, the function of representation/symbolisation.

Let us summarise the preceding discussion in order to clarify the relationships between the three senses of metonymy-as-repetition thus far articulated. In the first place, by virtue of the function of repression/overdetermination, expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making testify to an unconscious, synchronic metonymy of

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

meaning potentials metaphorically becoming as a diachronic metonymy of actualised meanings in consciousness. That is to say, conscious discourse simply *is* the repetitive, serial positing of signs – a movement among semiotic identities or signifying alternatives. Secondly, by virtue of metonymic combination and contexture, ‘the’ meaning of ‘a’ sign determined in consciousness is synonymous with the determination of a *field* of meaning or, equivalently, the assumption of a particular perspective on a ‘world’. That is to say, any sign posited admits consideration as a semiotic ensemble of less complex signs within which, by virtue of the repression of difference, it is always possible to discern the reiteration of a same (albeit, a same that, by virtue of the return of the repressed is sustained only insofar as it is fading). Thirdly, the manner by which the (structurally synchronic/metaphoric) ‘moment’ of the ‘precipitation’ of meaning is a (structurally diachronic/metonymic) function of both the *anticipation* and *retroactive determination* of meaning, implies that meaning precipitates *as* perpetuated: meaning *is as* reiterated. From the perspective of consciousness, then, metonymy-as-repetition implies that, always already, (1) signs are serially determined, (2) any sign determined is decomposable into an ensemble of signs, within which there may be discerned the repetition of a same, and (3) any sign *is* only insofar as *it is again*.

4.2 Moments of repetition in *Painting from “Malady”* and the *Malady* series

4.2.1 The metonymy of painting

Having presented a theoretical understanding of the metonymic dimension of the perpetuation of *points de capiton*, it is now timely to apply this model to the painted matter of *Painting from “Malady”* and the *Malady* series. Here, it is important to bear in mind the following points. Firstly, in accordance with the function of representation/symbolisation, *Painting from “Malady”* and the *Malady* series admit consideration as expressions or *signs* of subjectivity/meaning-making. In order to emphasise this detail, the terms in question will be placed in quotes: ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ and ‘the *Malady* series’. Secondly, by virtue of metonymic combination and contexture of signs, ‘the’ meaning of ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ and ‘the *Malady* series’, determined *in consciousness*, defines a relation of tension with a potentially infinite field of other signs (i.e., the big Other, symbolic order, signifying chain) – the greater part of which is repressed and, therefore, *unconscious*. Thirdly, however, insofar as the repressed is returning, it is also the case that ‘the’ meaning of ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ and ‘the *Malady* series’ *is as* reiterated and *is as* fading – which is to say, is sustained only in its ambiguity in the form of a repetitive movement among signifying alternatives. It is from this standpoint that one may say that the meaning of ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ and ‘the *Malady* series’ is sustained by virtue of *metonymy-as-repetition* or that, equivalently, ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ and ‘the *Malady* series’ admit consideration as signs of metonymy-as-repetition. Indeed, in the following discussion it will be convenient to distinguish two ‘moments’ of repetition. The first moment of repetition obtains insofar as the meanings in question invite interpretation as *reiterations of the same* sustained by virtue of the repression of difference. The second moment of repetition obtains insofar as, always already, the meanings of the signs in question are fading before the return of the repressed difference or, equivalently, the insistence of an identity-in-difference. Hence,

these meanings are sustained only in their ambiguity as *reiterations of the same that is not identical with itself* – i.e., in the form of a *movement* among signifying alternatives.³⁷⁷

Let us clarify how ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ and ‘the *Malady* series’ are signs that *are defined by or mean by virtue of* metonymic relations of combination and contexture. By virtue of metonymic combination, one may say that the sign ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ is defined through being composed of subsidiary signs such as ‘sanguineous annulus’, ‘fifteen-fold reiteration of the stencilled word MELODY’, or ‘freely-brushed, orange-red discus’. Similarly, by virtue of metonymic contexture, one may say that the sign ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ is defined by its membership in more complex semiotic ensembles represented/symbolised by signs such as ‘the *Malady* series’, ‘Hotere’s *oeuvre*’, ‘twentieth-century, modernist painting in Aotearoa/New Zealand’, and so on. Analogously, ‘the *Malady* series’ is a sign that means by virtue of its combination of more elementary signs such as ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’, ‘*Malady* series acrylic paintings on canvas’, ‘*Malady* series drawings in pen and ink wash on paper’, or even (as was suggested in chapter one) ‘the *Malady* book as a collection of poem-paintings by the poet-painter Manhire-Hotere’. At the same time, however, ‘the *Malady* series’ also is a sign defined by its inclusion in wider semiotic contexts such as ‘Hotere’s *Black Paintings*’, ‘Hotere’s *oeuvre*’ (or, perhaps, ‘the *oeuvre* of Manhire-Hotere’), ‘twentieth century painting in Aotearoa/New Zealand’ (or, perhaps, ‘twentieth century concrete verse in Aotearoa/New Zealand’) – clearly, the list of contexts may be extended indefinitely.

On this basis, one may say that the definition or meaning of the signs ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ and ‘the *Malady* series’ emerges or precipitates by virtue of relations of identity such as ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ = ‘sanguineous annulus’ or ‘the *Malady* series’ = ‘paintings exhibiting the application of art media to certain supports’. At the

³⁷⁷ I should point out that, in specifying two ‘moments’ of repetition, there is no suggestion of a discernibly ‘real’ or ‘actual’ temporal separation between ‘events’. Rather, the moments in question define intervals taking place in what Lacan would refer to as a purely ‘logical time’. That is to say, to all practical intents and purposes, the two moments of repetition are temporally coincident.

same time, however, one also must take cognizance of the fact that the meaning of the signs '*Painting from "Malady"*' and 'the *Malady* series' is sustained *only in its ambiguity* by virtue of a repression of difference (or, to be more precise, repressed/returning identities-in-difference) such that the meaning is expressed in the form of a repetitive movement among semiotic identities or signifying alternatives. Hence, anticipating the discussion to follow, one might say that the meaning of '*Painting from "Malady"*' emerges in the form of a movement among the semiotic identities '*Painting from "Malady"*' = 'sanguineous annulus', '*Painting from "Malady"*' = 'fifteen-fold reiteration of the stencilled word MELODY', '*Painting from "Malady"*' = 'freely-brushed, orange-red discus', and so forth. Similarly, one might say that the meaning of 'the *Malady* series' emerges in the form of a movement among the signifying alternatives 'the *Malady* series' = 'paintings exhibiting the application of art media to certain supports', 'the *Malady* series' = 'paintings exhibiting a palette of blacks and charcoal greys', 'the *Malady* series' = 'paintings juxtaposing stencilled text and simple, geometric forms', and so on.

As noted in chapter three, the repressed/returning identities-in-difference (by which the meanings of signs like '*Painting from "Malady"*' and 'the *Malady* series' are sustained only in their ambiguity) fundamentally elude the function of representation/symbolisation. Nevertheless, for the sake of argument, and in accordance with the infinite constellation of signs enlivened by virtue of metonymic combination and contexture, the repressed/returning identity-in-difference that renders ambiguous the meaning of the sign '*Painting from "Malady"*' might be represented/symbolised as '.../sanguineous annulus/fifteen-fold reiteration of the stencilled word MELODY/freely-brushed, orange-red discus/the *Malady* series/Hotere's *oeuvre*/twentieth-century, modernist painting in Aotearoa/New Zealand/...' Likewise, at risk of belabouring the point, the repressed/returning identity-in-difference that renders ambiguous the meaning of the sign 'the *Malady* series' may be represented/symbolised as '.../*Painting from "Malady"*/paintings exhibiting the application to art media to certain supports/paintings exhibiting a palette of blacks and charcoal greys/paintings juxtaposing stencilled text and

simple, geometric forms/Hotere's *oeuvre*/ twentieth-century, modernist painting in Aotearoa/New Zealand/...'

Here, two matters demand further consideration. Firstly, it should be apparent that, excepting the particular signs determined in consciousness (i.e., '*Painting from "Malady"*' and 'the *Malady* series'), the 'two', aforementioned fields of repressed/returning identities-in-difference are *synonymous*. This is simply to reaffirm that determining 'the' meaning of '*Painting from "Malady"*' and 'the *Malady* series' involves actualising or realising the big Other, symbolic order, or signifying chain (i.e., that which, encompasses meaning/forms actualised/realised in consciousness and an infinite realm of potentials that is unconscious) on two different 'levels' or, better perhaps, from two different 'perspectives'. Secondly, insofar as the signs '*Painting from "Malady"*' and 'the *Malady* series' mean by virtue of metonymic combination and contexture, the two, aforementioned moments of repetition apply equally to the subsidiary signs, *of which* they are combinations, and the more complex semiotic agglomerations, *into which* they are contextured. For the sake of convenience, the following discussion will illustrate moments of repetition in relation to subsidiary signs of which 'the *Malady* series' and '*Painting from "Malady"*' are *combined* – the analysis of 'the *Malady* series' functioning, in effect, as a *context* for the analysis of '*Painting from "Malady"*'.

4.2.2 Moments of repetition in the *Malady* series

From the level or perspective of 'the *Malady* series', then, let us consider the two moments of repetition with regard to the three aforementioned, semiotic identities by virtue of which 'the *Malady* series' means. Since each of these identities is, itself, a sign, we may omit the '=' and write them like so: (1) 'the *Malady* series' application of art media to certain supports', (2) 'the *Malady* series' palette of blacks and charcoal greys', and (3) 'the *Malady* series' juxtaposing of stencilled text and simple, geometric forms'. On the basis of the preceding discussion, the first moment of repetition obtains insofar as 'the *Malady* series' means by virtue of the reiteration of a same sustained on the basis of

a repression of difference. Here, it may be apparent that this difference is *temporal* and *spatial*. In the former case, one may say that, from one infinitesimal moment to the next, ‘the *Malady* series’ means by virtue of repeated encounters with the *same* or *typical* ‘application of art media to certain supports’, the *same* or *characteristic* ‘palette of blacks and charcoal greys’, and the *same* or *common* ‘juxtaposing of stencilled text and simple geometric forms’. In other words, the repression of temporal difference underpins one’s conviction that the same features of the world are repeatedly encountered – i.e., sustain their identity over time. In the latter case, metonymic combination and contexture of signs implies that ‘the *Malady* series’ application of art media to certain supports’, ‘the *Malady* series’ palette of blacks and charcoal greys’, and ‘the *Malady* series’ juxtaposing of stencilled text and simple, geometric forms’ are not inviolable gestalts but rather amenable to infinite, spatial subdivision. That is to say, ‘the *Malady* series’ may be separated into subgroups of paintings, individual works, or any spatial subdivision thereof. Indeed, it is only by virtue of the repression of these spatial differences that one may speak of the signs under consideration in the singular – e.g., as *the* ‘*Malady* series’ application of art media to certain supports’, *the* ‘*Malady* series’ palette of blacks and charcoal greys’, and *the* ‘*Malady* series’ juxtaposing of stencilled text and simple geometric forms’.

As previously suggested, the second moment of repetition obtains insofar as the meaning of ‘the *Malady* series’ is sustained only in its ambiguity, in the form of an endless movement among signifying alternatives. In the first place, this ambiguity testifies to the return of the repressed *temporal* difference such that the meanings of the signs in question are fading before the reiteration of the same that is, moment by moment, becoming different from itself. Hence, one may say that the meaning of ‘the *Malady* series’ is ambiguous to the extent that it evinces a temporal movement among the signifying alternatives ‘the *Malady* series’ application of art media to certain supports’ at time t_1 , ‘the *Malady* series’ application of art media to certain supports’ at time t_2 , and so forth. Secondly, this ambiguity may be understood in terms of the return of repressed *spatial* differences such that the meanings of each of the aforementioned three signs are fading before the insistence of their (potentially infinite) metonymic ‘subdivisions’. In

each case, these signs present as combinations of *different* elements, *separately iterated* (i.e., *different* applications of art media to certain supports, *different* palettes of blacks and charcoal greys, *different* juxtapositions of stencilled text and simple geometric forms) and as *reiterations of a same* (i.e., the *same* application of art media to certain supports, the *same* palette of blacks and charcoal greys, the *same* juxtaposition of stencilled text and simple geometric forms).

Therefore, in keeping with the terminology thus far employed, one may say that ‘the *Malady* series’ functions as a sign of metonymy-as-repetition insofar it means by virtue of the ambiguous, semiotic identities (1) ‘the *Malady* series’ *typical* application of art media to certain supports’, (2) ‘the *Malady* series’ *characteristic* palette of blacks and charcoal greys’, and (3) ‘the *Malady* series’ *common* juxtaposing of stencilled text and simple, geometric forms’. These semiotic identities are ambiguous to the extent that, temporally and spatially, they encompass a range of signifying alternatives. As previously observed, the alternatives disposed temporally define differences obtaining purely by virtue of the endless succession of infinitesimal moments and thus invite no further analysis. However, insofar as they define a much more diverse field of differences, the signifying alternatives disposed spatially do merit further examination. This investigation will serve the dual purpose of establishing the broad parameters of ‘the *Malady* series’ and emphasising the irremediable ambiguities and complexities to which this sign is subject. In so doing, the way will be prepared for the discussion in chapter five, where I will suggest that, in the final analysis, the sign ‘the *Malady* series’ refers to an ‘impossible object’, the identity and meaning of which rests on nothing more than the radically contingent articulation of the name ‘Malady’.

Let us begin with the first semiotic identity noted above: ‘the *Malady* series’ *typical* application of art media to certain supports’. On inspection, it is apparent that this sign encompasses a twofold equivocation. In the first place, ‘the *Malady* series’ *typical* application of selected art media to standard supports’ evinces a movement among the signifying alternatives ‘*Malady* series works featuring acrylic paint on stretched canvas’, ‘*Malady* series works featuring watercolour on paper’, and ‘*Malady* series works

featuring pencil and/or ballpoint pen on paper'.³⁷⁸ Secondly, 'the *Malady* series' typical application of art media to certain supports' testifies to a movement among the signifying alternatives 'Malady series works on differently-sized surfaces'. In this regard, even restricting one's attention to acrylic paintings on canvas, it is evident that the *dimensions* of *Malady* series works, whilst somewhat standardised, admit considerable variation.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ The first category of *Malady* series works – acrylic paintings on canvas – embraces those members of the *Malady* that are of primary concern (i.e., privileged) in this project. The second category of *Malady* series works – watercolour paintings on paper – is exemplified by the likes of *Malady Malady Malady* (1970, ref. 53). The third category of *Malady* series works – pencil and/or ballpoint pen drawings on paper – encompasses Hotere's working drawings for the *Malady* paintings, currently in the collection of the Hocken Library. For a reference to the Hocken Library's collection of working drawings for the *Malady* paintings (and reproductions of seventeen such works), see Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, <http://otago.ourheritage.ac.nz/collections/show/34>, (19.06.13).

In so characterising the media employed in *Malady* series works, it may be apparent that, for the sake of simplicity, I am neglecting the suggestion (made in chapter one) that *Malady* series works comprise poem/paintings by the poet/painter Manhire/Hotere. If this possibility is allowed then the semiotic identity 'the *Malady* series' typical application of art media to certain supports' also encompasses 'Malady series works featuring mechanically reproduced text and pen and ink drawings on paper bound into book form'.

³⁷⁹ The majority of the *Malady* series paintings identified in this project are executed on canvases approximately 70 inches (~1780mm) high and either 28 inches (~711mm) or 36 inches (~914mm) wide. Even among these works, however, small variations ensure that no two *Malady* paintings are, in fact, exactly the same size. Other members of the *Malady* series diverge from the standard above either partially or wholly. For example, the dimensions of *Painting from "Malady"* are usually given as 1116x912mm – 'non-standard' in height, but of a standard width. Also close to a standard width, but non-standard in height is the Dowse Art Museum's *Black Painting from "Malady"* (1970, ref. 54) at 2115x740mm. In verifying the dimensions of the Dowse Art Museum's *Black Painting from "Malady"*, I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Georgia Morgan (Registrar, Dowse Art Museum). For details of the dimensions of this work, see email correspondence between the author and Georgia Morgan, 29 November 2013. Of two *Malady* series paintings in the collection of Te Manawa, *Black Painting III from "Malady"* (1970, ref. 55), at 1800x1240mm, is of standard height, but non-standard width, whilst *Black Painting IIIa from "Malady"* (1970, ref. 56), at 1681x1376mm, deviates from the *Malady* series 'norm' in both height and width. In verifying the dimensions of the *Malady* series paintings in Te Manawa's collection, I also would like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance given by Jeff Fox (Te Manawa, Senior Curator), Susanna Shadbolt (Te Manawa, Assistant Curator), and Rebekah Clements (Te Manawa, Registrar). For details of the dimensions of *Black Painting III from "Malady"* and *Black Painting IIIa from "Malady"*, see email correspondence between the author and the aforementioned Te Manawa staff, 28 November 2013. Comprising a sub-series within the *Malady* paintings proper, the seven *Malady Panels* (1971, ref. 57) conform to the standard height of ~1780mm but define a third standard width of ~1065mm. As a final observation (that makes no claim to have exhausted the variances in question), in Dunedin Public Art Gallery, *Ralph Hotere, A survey 1963-73*, exh. cat. (Dunedin: Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 1974), np, there is

Turning to the second semiotic identity mentioned earlier – namely, the ‘*Malady* series’ characteristic palette of blacks and charcoal greys’ – it is evident that this sign evinces ambiguity by way of encompassing the signifying alternatives ‘variations in tone of pigment’, ‘variations in density of pigment’, ‘variations in uniformity of pigment’ – or, indeed, ‘palette of blacks and charcoal greys combined with other hues’.³⁸⁰ Finally, let us consider the third semiotic identity in question: ‘the *Malady* series common juxtaposing of stencilled text and simple geometric forms’. This sign encompasses at least three domains of difference. One domain is defined by the different stencils employed and the manner of their combination between and within the picture spaces of individual works. To this extent, ‘the *Malady* series common juxtaposing of stencilled text and simple geometric forms’ encompasses the signifying alternatives ‘MELODY *or* MALADY’, ‘MELODY *and* MALADY’, or ‘MELODY, MALADY, and MY LADY’.³⁸¹ A second

mention of a ‘**BLACK PAINTING ’72 from *Malady* a poem by Bill Manhire**’, described as ‘Selected for and first exhibited Benson and Hedges Art Award, 1972’, and the dimensions of which are given as 1985x1985mm.

³⁸⁰ Variations in the tone, density, and uniformity of the black and charcoal grey palette of *Malady* series works are particularly evident in *Painting XV from “Malady”* and *Black Painting XVII from “Malady”* (1970, ref. 58). That other tonalities are employed in members of the *Malady* series is, perhaps, most obvious in paintings like *Painting from “Malady”*, with its prominent orange-red discus, and *Black Painting IIIa from “Malady”*, with its eye-catching, chromatic sequence of annular rings. Subdued pink and purple hues inflect the stencilled text, vertical lines and vertical bands in the Dowse Art Museum’s *Black Painting from “Malady”*, whilst *Black Painting XII from “Malady”* exhibits a frame of MALADY stencils rendered in a dusky blue. In *Black Painting XI from “Malady”* (1970, ref. 59) and *Black Painting XIV from “Malady”* (1970, ref. 60), the violet and/or magenta tint of the prominent annular forms is reiterated, in a more understated fashion, in the dark backgrounds and stencilled script. In *Black Painting XIIB from “Malady”* (1970, ref. 61, fig. 10), the bisected arch-form is rendered in thinly applied tones of burgundy and chocolate.

³⁸¹ *Malady* series works that exhibit repetitions of *either* MELODY *or* MALADY include *Painting from “Malady”* (with its fifteen MELODYs) and works like *Black Painting XII from “Malady”* (where there are sixty three MALADYs, forty one contained within the central cruciform and twenty two defining a rectangular boundary). *Malady* series works that juxtapose repetitions of MELODY *and* MALADY include *Black Painting XV from “Malady”* (where the diagonal iterations of MELODY and MALADY interpenetrate in the form of an ‘X’) and Te Papa’s *Black Painting XIII from “Malady”* (1970, ref. 62) (where, disposed leftwards in the picture space, there are separate columns of MALADY and MELODY, respectively). Members of the *Malady* series in which the reiterations of MELODY and/or MALADY are accompanied by a single iteration of MY LADY include *Black Painting from “Malady”*, in the collection of the Dowse Art Museum (where MY LADY terminates a descending sequence of MALADYs), and *Black Painting XVII from “Malady”* (where MY LADY supports a pedestal of MELODYs).

domain of difference obtains insofar as ‘the *Malady* series’ *common* juxtaposing of stencilled text and simple geometric forms’ encompasses the signifying alternatives (1) ‘stencils arranged in rows and columns’, (2) ‘semi-random distributions in which stencils overlap’, (3) ‘dense arrays in which stencils may be oriented in different ways’, (4) ‘stencils arranged diagonally’, (5) ‘stencils arranged radially’, and (6) ‘stencils placed along the line of an arc’.³⁸² Lastly (although this does not, of course, exhaust the possibilities in question), ‘the *Malady* series’ *common* juxtaposing of stencilled text and simple geometric forms’ defines a third domain of difference insofar as it encompasses the signifying alternatives ‘picture space traversed by vertical lines’, ‘picture space divided into vertical bands’, ‘picture space exhibiting circular discs and rings’, ‘picture space exhibiting rectangles, arches, cruciforms, or X-shapes’.³⁸³

A third example is *Black Painting XIV from “Malady”*. Here, MY LADY occupies the centre of a picture space entirely filled with stencilled script, upon which is superimposed a violet annulus.

³⁸² *Malady* series works in which stencils are arranged in rows and/or columns are exemplified by the aforementioned *Black Painting from “Malady”*, in the Dowse Art Museum, and *Black Painting XII from “Malady”*. The placement of stencils in semi-random, overlapping distributions is a feature of *Painting from “Malady”* and *Black Painting XI from “Malady”*. In both cases, there is reiteration of MELODY within bounding annular forms. Moreover, *Black Painting XI from “Malady”* and *Black Painting XIV from “Malady”* are examples of *Malady* series works in which the disposition of stencils defines a dense array. In the former work, that part of the picture space outside the annular feature is filled with an orderly array of MALADYs – except for the bottom of the painting, where three lines of MALADY are interleaved with two lines of MELODY. In the latter work, the single iteration of MY LADY is accompanied, above and below, by two vertical groups of nine MELODYs. The remainder of the picture space is filled with MALADYs, oriented vertically and horizontally, and thereby defining a broad, rectangular frame within which the other textual elements are enclosed. As previously noted, *Black Painting XV from “Malady”* bears witness to the stencilling of MELODY and MALADY along diagonals. The radial arrangement of MELODYs within an annular frame is a defining characteristic of Te Manawa’s *Black Painting IIIa from “Malady”*. Finally, in *Black Painting XIIB from “Malady”*, a linear sequence of fourteen MALADYs frames the bisected form of an arch.

³⁸³ *Black Painting from “Malady”*, in the Dowse Art Museum, and *Black Painting XIII from “Malady”* exemplify those *Malady* series works in which the picture space is divided into vertical lines or rectangular bands in a fashion reminiscent of Barnett Newman’s so-called ‘zip’ motif. In addition to *Painting from “Malady”*, with its glowing annulus and orange-red discus, circular forms are prominent in *Black Painting IIIa from “Malady”* (in this case, in the form of a series of seven concentric rings in the colours of the spectrum), *Black Painting XI from “Malady”* (three concentric violet rings), and *Black Painting XIV from “Malady”* (where a centrally disposed, violet annulus is superimposed on the packed field of stencilled script). The seven *Malady Panels* are noteworthy insofar as they integrate rectilinear and annular forms. Thus, in the upper two thirds of each panel there is presented, in one of the seven colours of the rainbow, a single

4.2.2 Moments of repetition in *Painting from “Malady”*

Having unpacked some of the meaning complexity of ‘the *Malady* series’, now let us consider the two moments of repetition with regard to ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’. Here, the suggestion is that ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ means by virtue of the three aforementioned, semiotic identities (1) ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s sanguineous annulus’, (2) ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s fifteen-fold reiteration of the stencilled word MELODY’, and (3) ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s orange-red discus’. In light of what has been said previously, the first moment of repetition obtains insofar as ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ means by virtue of the reiteration of a same sustained on the basis of a repression of difference. The repression of temporal difference allows one to say that, from one infinitesimal moment to the next, ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ means by virtue of repeated encounters with the *same* sanguineous annulus, through repeated readings of the *same* fifteen-fold reiteration of the word MELODY, and by repeatedly apprehending the *same* orange-red discus. Similarly, the repression of spatial differences enlivened by metonymic combination and contexture of signs allows one to speak of the identities in question in the singular – i.e., as *the* ‘sanguineous annulus of *Painting from “Malady”*’, *the* ‘fifteen-fold reiteration of the word MELODY of *Painting from “Malady”*’, and *the* ‘orange-red discus of *Painting from “Malady”*’.

Nevertheless, even though the identity ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s sanguineous annulus’ would seem to define a sign that is indivisibly singular (i.e., one interprets this sign as a reference to an unbroken, glowing ring), it is possible to conceive of it as a

annulus. The lower third of the picture space in each panel contains three rectilinear forms – the centremost and narrowest serving as a ground for vertical columns of stencilled script (ten iterations of MELODY on three panels, ten iterations of MALADY on the remaining four panels). It also may be observed that combining circles and rectangles produces the form of the rounded arch, prevalent in Romanesque architecture. At least two members of the *Malady* series exhibit these features: *Black Painting XIIB from “Malady”* and *Black Painting XVII from “Malady”*. At least another brace of *Malady* series works exhibit cruciforms – namely, *Black Painting XII from “Malady”* and Te Manawa’s *Black Painting III from “Malady”*, in which the cruciform is of the *Tau*-cross variety. Finally, as previously acknowledged, at least one member of the *Malady* series brandishes a distinctive X-shape: *Black Painting XV from “Malady”*.

metonymy of identical and infinitesimal ring arcs oriented and joined in such a way as to present the appearance of a seamless, circular whole. From this perspective, and in accordance with the terminology previously employed, one can say that ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’ functions as a sign of metonymy-as-repetition insofar it means by virtue of the ambiguous, semiotic identity ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s infinite repetition of the *same* ring arc.³⁸⁴ The identities ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s fifteen-fold reiteration of the stencilled word MELODY’ and ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s orange-red discus’ provide, perhaps, a clearer illustration of this point insofar as both signs present, more obviously, as metonymic combinations. In the former case, Hotere’s employment of a stencil (or stencils) reinforces the trope of repetition insofar as the resulting text is imbued with a degree of homogeneity and regularity. In consequence, ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s fifteen-fold reiteration of the stencilled word MELODY’ does not merely present as fifteen different MELODYs, separately iterated. On the contrary, one tends to read it as the fifteen-fold rehearsal of the *same* word ‘MELODY’. In a similar fashion, ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s orange-red discus’ comprises a painterly patchwork within which the modulation of pigment testifies to innumerable brushstrokes. Compared with the stencilled MELODYs, the orange-red discus exhibits little order, structure, or constraint. Nevertheless, one may attribute to it a certain homogeneity in tone (orange-red) and style of execution (i.e., ‘free’, ‘expressive’, ‘not obviously figurative’, etc.). In consequence, ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s orange-red discus’ does not simply present as *x* different touches of the brush. On the contrary, one tends to read this sign as a coherent unity of these touches that, collectively, constitute a freely brushed, orange-red discus. That is to say, ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s orange-red discus’ defines a sign in which, stylistically and tonally, there is a reiteration of the *same* brushstroke.

How *Painting from “Malady”*’s compositional features relate to the second moment of repetition is, as previously noted, a function of how the meanings of these signs are sustained only in their ambiguity, bearing witness to an endless movement among signifying alternatives. In the first place, this ambiguity testifies to the return of the

³⁸⁴ Recall that, in chapter one, this appeal to the metonymic subdivision of meaning/forms in paintings was made in order to justify the idea that *Malady* series paintings (indeed, expressions of subjectivity *per se*) admit an infinity of ‘subject positions’.

repressed *temporal* difference such that the meanings of the signs under consideration are fading before the reiteration of the same that is moment by moment, becoming different from itself.³⁸⁵ Secondly, this ambiguity may be understood in terms of the return of repressed *spatial* differences such that the meanings of each of the three identities under consideration are fading before the insistence of their (potentially infinite) metonymic ‘subdivisions’. In each case, the signs in question present as combinations of *different* elements, *separately iterated* (i.e., different ring arcs, different MELODYs, different brushstrokes) *and* as *reiterations of a same* (i.e., the same ring arc, the same MELODY, the same brushstroke). The impression that there are, in fact, different ring arcs, different MELODYs or different brushstrokes is a function of differences in spatial positioning within *Painting from “Malady”*’s picture plane and, in concert with this spatial disposition, inflections in tone, hue, and density of pigmentation.

For example, whilst *Painting from “Malady”*’s bounding annulus initially presents as perfectly regular, on close inspection, the ring-shaped feature evinces a multitude of small variations in width, tone, paint thickness, edge sharpness, and circularity. Rather more obviously, as if imprinted by an imperfectly calibrated mechanism, the stencilled MELODYs define teetering rows and columns, and frequently overlap on horizontals that are not quite parallel. Tonally speaking, the MELODYs define a continuum from the strident to the almost invisible. Moreover, whilst the majority of the MELODYs are rendered in a light orange hue, others employ darker pigmentation – burgundy, chocolate, or cherry red. Indeed, this difference in colouration is particularly apparent in a few cases where Hotere has ‘reprinted’ a stencilled letter. This retouching is evident, for example, in the M of the second-to-bottom MELODY in the column of four occupying the upper right quadrant of the orange-red discus. The freely brushed areas of the painting exhibit these kinds of differences with even greater emphasis. Here, individual brushstrokes are deposited in overlapping layers, blended, and superimposed to form contrasting regions

³⁸⁵ That is to say, in keeping with the terminology employed in section 4.2.1, the meaning of *Painting from “Malady”*’s compositional features is ambiguous to the extent that it evinces a temporal movement among the signifying alternatives ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s compositional features at time t_1 ’, ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s compositional features at time t_2 ’, and so forth.

of dense, brilliant, scarlet-toned brushwork (e.g., the loosely rendered ‘structure’ surrounding the solitary, dark red MELODY positioned in the upper left quadrant of *Painting from “Malady”*’s orange-red discus) and areas of more diaphanous, dimly lit, plum-coloured pigmentation (e.g., the lower left portion of the orange-red discus, within which two stencilled MELODYs are disposed, the lower being translated rightwards in relation to the upper).

In seeking to specify, more precisely, how it is that the meaning of *Painting from “Malady”*’s compositional features is ambiguous to the extent that it evinces a spatial movement among signifying alternatives, it is apparent that one encounters a field of infinite complexity. By way of conveying a sense of this complexity, one might attempt to define these signifying alternatives with the aid of an algorithm whose terms admit infinite range and variety. This formula might be written: ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s compositional features of type_n (e.g., $n = 1 \rightarrow$ ‘sanguineous annulus’, $n = 2 \rightarrow$ ‘stencilled word MELODY’, $n = 3 \rightarrow$ ‘freely-brushed, orange-red discus’, etc.), at spatial coordinates (x_n, y_n) , of tone_n, paint thickness_n, edge sharpness_n, degree of over-painting_n, degree of orthogonality_n, degree of circularity_n...’ Here, it is not only the case that the list of qualifying criteria may be extended without limit but even the ranges of particular criteria (as specified by the use of the subscript ‘n’) are infinitely variable. For example, in seeking to delimit the boundaries of an arbitrarily defined patch of *Painting from “Malady”*’s picture space, it is clear that (x_n, y_n) do not simply define point values but rather surface areas. In consequence, the term (x_n, y_n) is merely a shorthand that demands to be more rigorously stated in accordance with the notation of a differential calculus.

A more elegant expression of the formula above would seem to be the province of the logician or mathematician. As this task is outside my competence, in the remainder of this subsection, I merely address some of the possibilities enlivened by the term ‘compositional features of type_n’. In this regard, as previously suggested in chapter one, the ambiguous, semiotic identity ‘*Painting from “Malady”*’s sanguineous annulus’ also invites interpretation as a *symbolic* representation of, variously, the letter ‘O’, the empty set ‘()’, or the numeral ‘0’, and a *pictorial* representation of, variously, material

substance (e.g., a ruby orb, a person's head, a mouth full of song), and immaterial emptiness (e.g., a foreground aperture or opening onto a background space of indeterminate extent). Therefore, insofar as it is sustained only in its ambiguity, the meaning of '*Painting from "Malady"*'s sanguineous annulus' testifies to the return of the repressed identity-in-difference that, for the sake of argument, may be represented as '...symbolic/O/()/0/pictorial/material substance/ruby orb/person's head/mouth full of song/immaterial emptiness/opening into a void/...' Equivalently, one may say that the meaning of '*Painting from "Malady"*'s sanguineous annulus' admits consideration as a sign of metonymy-as-repetition insofar as it bears witness to a movement among the signifying alternatives 'symbol', 'O', '()', '0', 'picture', 'material substance', 'ruby orb', 'person's head', 'mouth full of song', 'immaterial emptiness', 'opening into a void', and so on.

By virtue of the execution and arrangement of its compositional elements, *Painting from "Malady"* excites associations similar to those previously observed in relation to *Practical Religion* or *Victory over Death 2*. Letters and words seem to be suspended on a series of superimposed, transparent planes or, indeed, cast adrift in a misty, turbulent, atmosphere, through which they scintillate like stars glimpsed between cloudy masses. To this extent, *Painting from "Malady"*'s stencilled text and expressive brushwork function as signs of metonymy-as-repetition insofar as they define a movement among the signifying alternatives 'light', 'dark', 'foreground', 'background', 'surface', 'depth', 'presence', 'absence', 'substance', 'void', 'constraint', 'freedom', and so on. However, even these meaning ambiguities are only the tip of iceberg. For example, if one succumbs to the temptation to read the word MELODY as an evocation of music (i.e., synaesthetically) then its repetition is akin to a recurring musical riff or phrase; colour contrasts suggest notes of different pitch; variations in the texture and density of applied pigment evoke a medley of timbres; visual brightness is analogous to volume; the play of relatively well-defined stencils and more freely brushed pigment functions as a metaphor for the aural experience of listening to a song transported on shifting currents of air, now swelling close, now fading into distance.

Finally, further meaning resonances are engendered in view of the fact that, in Hotere's *oeuvre*, the annulus functions, among other things, as a symbol of love or desire (e.g., it is the exemplary sign of insistent repetition, of the endless cycles of fertility and procreation, and of the erotic potentials associated with all openings of the human body). This is particularly evident in the large, four-panel painting (named after yet another example of Manhire's verse) *February, May and the Birds of Ice. The Moon Drowns in its Voices of Water* (1970, ref. 63), where the juxtaposition of bright red circles and blue-violet, geometric blocks creates a stylised presentation of the word LOVE.³⁸⁶ With regard

³⁸⁶ In Auckland City Art Gallery, *Ten Big Paintings*, exh. cat. (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1971), np, http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/media/6507939/1971_03.pdf, (20.02.15), this painting is detailed as follows:

Ralph Hotere born Mitimiti 1931
 FEBRUARY MAY AND THE BIRDS OF ICE
 THE MOON DROWNS IN ITS VOICES OF WATER
 (Poem: *Bill Manhire*)
 pigment dyes in alkyd resin on canvas 10 x 20

As noted in T.J. McNamara, '“Ten Big Paintings”, Masterly Works at City Art Gallery', *New Zealand Herald*, 11 February 1971, section 1, 9, Hotere's contribution to this exhibition consisted of 'four panels' in which 'Vivid red circles hover in deep space over a pattern of shifting reflections. Unity is given by letters within the circles which spell "Love."' There is also mention of this work in Dunedin Public Art Gallery, *Ralph Hotere: A survey 1963-73* (Dunedin: Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 1974). There, it is described as 'first exhibited Auckland City Art Gallery, 1971' and as a 'set of 4 panels each 305.0 x 152.5'. Since 1974, this painting has been in the collection of Dunedin Public Art Gallery (5-1974). See <http://collection.dunedin.art.museum/search.do?id=30755&db=object&page=1&view=detail>, (29.11.13). In confirming the identity of this painting, I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Genevieve Webb (Registrar, Dunedin Public Art Gallery).

That annular forms, in Hotere's paintings, function (among other things) as symbols of love and desire is supported by various other evidence. In the first place, whilst it does not specifically mention any paintings containing circle forms, one might consider the association of 'Love' and 'Zero' in Mark Young, 'Love plus Zero/no Limit', *Ascent*, v1, n3, April 1969. Secondly, in Francis McWhannell, 'Ralph Hotere, Working Painting for Big Panel' in Webb's, *Important Works of Art* (c. 2009), np, <http://www.webbs.co.nz/node/77555>, (27.11.13), it is observed that the format of *Working Painting for Big Panel* (1970, ref. 64) (a pigment and dye on canvas study for one of the panels Hotere submitted for the exhibition *Ten Big Paintings*) echoes that of the cover design Hotere provided for Tuwhare, *Come Rain Hail* (Dunedin: The Bibliography Room, University of Otago, 1970). That is to say, an orange-red annulus is disposed on a purple ground. As McWhannell observes, further, Tuwhare's book features his well-known ode to Hotere, which includes the following stanza:

But when you score a superb orange
 circle on a purple thought-base

to the annular forms employed in *Malady* series paintings, this reading also harmonises with Manhire's characterisation of *Malady* as 'a very sloppy old love poem, really.'³⁸⁷ Relevant, in this regard, is the degree to which the metonymy of 'MALADY', 'MELODY', and 'MY LADY' suggests the love sickness veiled beneath the chaste and courtly balladry of the troubadour. From this perspective, *Painting from "Malady"*'s stencilled text and expressionistic, sanguineous brushwork is a visual ode to the flames of passion or a fire in the blood. Insofar as the painting invites interpretation as a representation of a love fever, sickness, or *malady*, it implies that the travails of desire are both glorious and perilous, life-affirming and life-destroying. In this way, the compositional elements in Hotere's painting function as signs of repetition in that they bear witness to a movement among signifying alternatives such as 'loud', 'silent', 'proximity', 'distance', 'heat', 'cold', 'consummation', 'disappointment', 'creation', 'destruction', 'life', 'death'.

I shake my head and say: hell, what
is this thing, called love

Like, I'm euchered man. I'm eclipsed (17)

Finally, as illustrated in Hotere, Kriselle Baker, and Vincent O'Sullivan, *Ralph Hotere* (Auckland: Ron Sang Publications, 2008), 61, there exists a dye and enamel work on canvas entitled *O For Love* (1970, ref. 65). In size and format, this painting is very similar to the aforementioned *Working Painting for Big Panel*. On a navy blue ground, there is disposed a fine, magenta annulus intersecting a deeper blue triangle, oriented with its apex pointing down.

³⁸⁷ Manhire quoted in O'Brien, 'Some Paintings I Am Frequently Asked About', 23.

4.3 No beginning and no end: the metonymy of desire

4.3.1 The Other's desire and significant insistence

Thus far, I have suggested that the *point de capiton* metonymically perpetuated admits consideration as a sign or symptom of metonymy-as-repetition. In other words, metonymy is understood to be synonymous with repetition insofar as, in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, (1) meaning *is as* reiterated, and (2) meaning is sustained only in its ambiguity – which is to say, in the form of a repression/returning of an identity-in-difference or, equivalently, a repetitive movement among signifying alternatives. In light of these deliberations, the present discussion seeks to justify the appellation *desire* for that which perpetuates meaning (of painting or, indeed, any expression of language-mediated subjectivity) *as* automatism, metonymy, repetition (i.e., *as* a repetitive movement among signifying alternatives). Particularly relevant, in this regard, are Lacan's various characterisations of subjective desire *as* metonymy. Thus, in 'The Instance of the Letter', it is asserted that 'desire... is caught in the rails of metonymy, eternally extending toward the *desire for something else*' and 'the symptom is a metaphor... desire *is* a metonymy'.³⁸⁸ Similarly, in 'The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power', Lacan suggests that 'desire is the metonymy of the want-to-be' and, in *Seminar VI*, that 'Desire is the metonymy of being in the subject'.³⁸⁹ In seeking to elaborate the Lacanian understanding of desire as metonymy, it will be convenient to express desire in terms of a repetitive movement or impetus to (1) *recover* that which is constituted as primordially lost and/or (2) *resolve* that which is constituted as an irreducible remainder – where, in both cases, that which *is as* primordially lost and *is as* irreducible remainder invites interpretation as a mythical, founding object, moment, or condition of being. However, in so doing, it will be necessary to relinquish the metaphysical-dynamical conception of desire as a fundamental, driving *force* and seek a

³⁸⁸ Lacan, 'The Instance of the Letter', 431, 439.

³⁸⁹ Ibid, 'Direction of the Treatment', 520, and *ibid*, *Seminar VI*, Seminar 1, 12 November 1958, 15.

logico-structural understanding of desire in terms of the *topology* of surfaces. Relevant, in this regard, is Žižek's characterisation of the Lacanian 'notion of the drive' as

...“desubstantialised”... not a primordial positive force but a purely geometrical, topological phenomenon, the name for the curvature of the space of desire’ ...³⁹⁰

By way of establishing a convenient framework within which to negotiate Lacan's variegated reflections on subjective desire, it may be useful to briefly reiterate three key points made thus far regarding the nature of subjectivity/meaning-making. Firstly, by definition, expressions of subjectivity are language-mediated. This means that, secondly, expressions of subjectivity are law-governed and, thirdly, expressions of subjectivity define a counterpoise of possibility and impossibility. The first point affirms that, in accordance with the function of representation/symbolisation, subjective experience is experience *in* and *of* a field of meaning: it is thinking *in* and *as* signs. It is *from* this language-mediated standpoint that all hypothetical determinations of 'reality' proceed. The second point affirms that language-mediated expressions of subjectivity involve a reciprocity of metaphor and metonymy (i.e., a *structuring of structure* or, indeed, a *figuring of desire*) such that, by virtue of a 'hidden' and 'metaphoric' function of pure difference, unconscious metonymy (i.e., a synchronic structure of signifiers-as-potentials) *becomes* as conscious metonymy (i.e., a diachronic sequence of signs, signifieds, *points de capiton*), in which metaphoric discontinuities are repetitively sutured or subsumed. The third point affirms that unconscious metonymy becoming as conscious metonymy defines the order of the *possible* insofar as this encompasses that which *can* be articulated in the system of language (whether unconsciously subsisting *in potentia* or imagined in consciousness). That which exceeds and eludes the function of representation/symbolisation defines the real conceived as the order of the *impossible*.

³⁹⁰ Žižek, 'Prolegomena to a future answer to Dr Butler', *Agenda, Australian Contemporary Art*, i43, July 1995, 8-9. Invoking the notion of curved space in order to think what might be termed the 'real' of the drives and/or of desire is reiterated in other writing by Žižek. See, for example, *ibid*, *How to read Lacan* (New York and London, W.W. Norton & Co., 2007 (2006)), 77, and *ibid*, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2006), 61.

The metaphoric function of pure difference exemplifies the real insofar as 'it' effaces itself in its very operation, presencing *as* absence, appearing *as* disappeared.

Whilst the Lacanian understanding of subjective desire as language-mediated automatism/metonymy/repetition is complex and multivalent, for the purposes of the present discussion it may be usefully articulated in relation to the following two ideas: (1) 'man's desire is the Other's desire' and (2) desire is equivalent to 'repetitive insistence, significant insistence'.³⁹¹ The first statement reflects the Lacanian reworking of the Hegelian dialectic of desire (i.e., desire expressed in terms of a relationship between other and same) through the transforming lens of structural linguistics.³⁹² In this regard, as noted in the thesis Introduction, two interpretations of Lacan's aphorism are especially noteworthy. Firstly, one desires to be *what the other desires* – which is to say, one desires *recognition* or *love from* the other. Secondly, one desires *as an other* – as if one were another person or adopting another person's point of view.³⁹³ The first formulation

³⁹¹ Lacan, *Seminar II*, 206.

³⁹² The dialectical understanding of desire in terms of a tension between self and other underpins the discussion of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111-19. In the first place, Hegel maintains that, *in itself*, self-consciousness defines a relation of tension with otherness (i.e., to recall the terminology employed in chapter three, self-consciousness obtains as an identity-in-difference):

Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged....

Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come *out of itself*. This has a twofold significance: first, it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an *other* being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self. (111)

In Hegel's view, this 'action of one self-consciousness' also applies in the intersubjective field:

...this movement of self-consciousness in relation to another self-consciousness... has itself the double significance of being both its own action and the action of the other as well... the movement is simply the double movement of the two self-consciousnesses. Each sees the *other* do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does in so far as the other does the same. (111-12)

³⁹³ As various commentators point out, Lacan's aphorism closely resonates with Alexandre Kojève's interpretation of Hegel. See, for example, Homer, 22-24, Evans, 37-38, and Edward S. Casey and J. Melvin Woody, 'Hegel, Heidegger, Lacan: The Dialectic of Desire' in Joseph H.

challenges the privileged notion of the subject as an individual self-sufficiency. The second formulation ushers in the conception of subjectivity defined in terms of the tension obtaining between the individual and a transindividual Otherness. As noted in chapter two, that Lacan understands the transindividual dimension of subjectivity to be language-mediated is evident from his use of the term ‘Other’ – that is to say, the ‘big Other’ of the symbolic order or, equivalently, the ‘transindividual’, law-governed structure of language-mediated, social and cultural reality. In the *Seminar* of the mid 1950s to early 1960s, this understanding is also evident in Lacan’s repeated insistence that the ‘Other with a capital O... [is] the locus of the word’.³⁹⁴

The equivalence Lacan establishes between desire and ‘significant insistence’ reflects the application of structural linguistics to what, in ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ (1920), Freud posits in order to explain the so-called ‘compulsion to repeat’ or *Wiederholungszwang* – namely, that which exceeds the psychical homeostasis maintained by virtue of the mediation of the primary process by the secondary process (or, equivalently, the mediation of the pleasure principle by the reality principle).³⁹⁵ Freud conceives of this as an instinctual ‘*urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state*

Smith and William Kerrigan (eds), *Psychiatry and the Humanities*, v6, *Interpreting Lacan* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 76-88. Indeed, Evans observes (132, 144-45) that Lacan attended Kojève’s lectures on Hegel, presented at the École des Hautes Études, between 1933 and 1939. These lectures were subsequently published in Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, assembled by Raymond Queneau, ed. Allan Bloom, trans James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York and London: Basic Books, Inc., 1969, originally published as *Introduction à la Lecture de Hegel* (2nd ed.; Paris: Gallimard, 1947)).

³⁹⁴ See, for example Lacan, *Seminar V*, Seminar 27, 25 June 1958, 353, *ibid*, *Seminar VI*, Seminar 12, 11 February 1959, 148, *ibid*, *Seminar VIII*, Seminar 12, 1 March 1961, 145, and *ibid*, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 14, 21 March 1962, 143.

³⁹⁵ The expression ‘compulsion to repeat’ first appears in Freud, ‘Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through’ (1914) in SE, v12, 150. Here, the compulsion to repeat is elaborated in terms of a distinction between remembering and repeating such that what is repressed is not reproduced in memory but rather finds expression in the repetition of certain modes of behaviour. Thus, Freud asserts:

...we may say that the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it.

of things’ or ‘the *conservative* nature of living substance’, in accordance with which ‘ “the aim of all life is death”. ’³⁹⁶ In short, Freud proposes that the ‘beyond’ of the pleasure principle is a ‘death instinct’.³⁹⁷ In *Seminar II*, Lacan’s linguistically-inspired transformation of Freud is evident from the assertion that

The beyond of the pleasure principle is expressed in the word *Wiederholungszwang*. This is incorrectly translated in French by *automatisme de répétition* and I think I am giving you a better rendition with the notion of *insistence* [*insistance*], repetitive insistence, significant insistence. This function is at the very root of language in so far as a world is a universe subjected to language.³⁹⁸

Similarly, in the ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter” ’, Lacan asserts:

My research has led me to the realisation that repetition automatism (*Wiederholungszwang*) has its basis in what I have called the *insistence* of the signifying chain.³⁹⁹

From a Lacanian perspective, Freud’s speculations anticipate the modelling of subjective experience as language-mediated (i.e., *law-governed*) and, thereby, as a matter of structural necessity, defined in terms of a counterpoise of possibility and impossibility. The order of the *possible* is implicit in Freud’s suggestion that the death instinct, as an expression of an overriding conservation law or restitutive tendency, is the condition of possibility for subjective experience *per se*. The order of the *impossible* is implicit in Freud’s characterisation of the death instinct as ‘beyond’ the psychological homeostasis of pleasure principle and reality principle. That is to say, the death instinct is posited as that

³⁹⁶ Ibid, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ (1920) in SE, v18, 20-22, 36. For an overview of the Freudian conception of the psyche as a homeostasis maintained by the mediation of the primary process by the secondary process, see section 8.5.

³⁹⁷ Strictly speaking, in *ibid*, 44, there is no explicit reference to a ‘death instinct’ in the singular – rather Freud speaks of the ‘opposition between the ego or death instincts and the sexual or life instincts’. Whilst the precise details of Freud’s argument are of tangential interest to the present discussion, for the sake of completeness, I present a more comprehensive summary in section 8.7.

³⁹⁸ Lacan, *Seminar II*, 206.

³⁹⁹ Ibid, ‘Seminar on “The Purloined Letter” ’, 6.

which, in ‘enlivening’ the very possibility of a psychical homeostasis is, nevertheless, excluded from or radically outside the terms of reference *of* that psychical homeostasis. Thus, in *Seminar II*, Lacan summarises Freud’s argument as a recognition that

...something doesn’t satisfy the pleasure principle... what comes out of one of the systems – that of the unconscious...

... has something disturbing about it. It is dissymmetrical. It doesn’t quite fit. Something in it eludes the system of equations and the evidence borrowed from the forms of thought of the register of energetics as they were introduced in the middle of the nineteenth century...⁴⁰⁰

To recall the discussion in the thesis Prologue, the idea that modelling subjectivity *as* law-governed demands taking account of that which is, in a sense, excluded from the field of the law even as it constitutes that field is intrinsic to Lacan’s subsequent logico-structural conception of the ‘beyond’ of the pleasure principle in terms of the structurally necessary counterpoise of possibility and impossibility that is proper to any symbolic system. This logico-structural understanding underpins Lacan’s aforementioned proposal that ‘The beyond of the pleasure principle is... repetitive insistence, significant insistence’ and his affirmation that, with regard to resolving

...the questions of the relations between the Freudian notion of the death instinct and what I have called significant insistence...

...the point we’re getting to is none other than desire and whatever can be said about it on the basis of our experience...⁴⁰¹

In ‘The Instance of the Letter’, the notion of ‘significant insistence’ is further elaborated in terms of metaphor and metonymy such that, as noted previously, Lacan asserts ‘the symptom *is* a metaphor... desire *is* a metonymy’. This succinct formula reflects the fact that desire-as-significant insistence encompasses metaphor *and* metonymy insofar as these are reciprocal functions in language-mediated expressions of

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid, *Seminar II*, 61.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid, 221.

subjectivity/meaning-making. A reciprocity of this kind is implicit when one speaks of ‘the insistent return of the repressed’ or ‘the insistence of a signifier without a signified’. Each signified precipitates *as* metonymically displaced in concert with the metaphorical return of a repressed signifier. However, given that the function of pure difference associated with the metaphoric dimension of significant insistence is ‘hidden’ (i.e., of the order of the real-as-impossibility), always already it is the case that metaphoric discontinuities are encountered *as* sutured into metonymic continua (i.e., the order of the possible; that which is possible to express in language), wherein meaning *is as* a repetitive movement among signifying alternatives.

4.3.2 The primordially lost origin of desire

Lacan’s understanding that ‘man’s desire is the Other’s desire’ and that desire is ‘significant insistence’ affirms that the Lacanian conception of desire is commensurate with a model of subjectivity that is (1) language-mediated and, therefore, (2) governed in accordance with the laws of metaphor and metonymy, and (3) counterpoised in terms of possibility and impossibility. Equivalently, one may say that *language-mediated expressions of subjectivity evince the structure of subjective desire*. This said, it now remains to explain how desire thus conceived testifies to an impetus to (1) *recover* that which is constituted as primordially lost and (2) *resolve* that which is constituted as an irreducible remainder – namely, a mythical, founding object, moment, or condition of being. Let us, firstly, elaborate the dimension of loss and, on this basis, proceed to address the dimension of irreducibility. In this regard, the idea that significant insistence bears witness to an imperative to *recover* that which is irremediably lost follows from the identity Lacan posits between ‘repetitive insistence, significant insistence’ and the Freudian understanding that repetition compulsion testifies to the operation of a death instinct – a supervening principle of conservation or restitutive tendency that is condition of possibility of *and* ‘beyond’ the psychical homeostasis maintained by the pleasure principle. Insofar as it is of the order of the real-as-impossible, this ‘beyond’ of the pleasure principle – which is to say, the ‘ground’ of subjective desire and, indeed,

subjectivity *per se* – fundamentally exceeds and eludes the function of representation/symbolisation.

Given that the ‘beyond’ of the pleasure principle is of the order of the real-as-impossible, it should be apparent that there is no possibility of *really* or *actually* recovering the ‘origin’ that is the objective of subjective desire. Rather, there is only a perpetual movement among signifying alternatives such that, as Lacan points out, desire is ‘caught in the rails of metonymy, eternally extending toward the *desire for something else*.’ This is to affirm that the *founding* object, moment, or condition or being ‘manifests’ *as* lost, missing, excluded, impossible. Equivalently, one might say that subjectivity is *constitutively lacking*. Particularly relevant, in this respect, is Lacan’s assertion, in *Seminar II*, that

Desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn’t the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists.⁴⁰²

I would suggest that this statement is precisely equivalent to Lacan’s aforementioned contentions, in ‘The Direction of the Treatment’, that ‘desire is the metonymy of the want-to-be’ and, in *Seminar VI*, that ‘Desire is the metonymy of being in the subject.’ Here, the implication is that the subjectivity paradoxically ‘existing’ by virtue of a ‘lack of being’ is not so much insufficient as incomplete, in process, becoming, *in potentia*. The ‘metonymy of being in the subject’ is nothing other than this condition of becoming whereby, moment by moment, subjectivity involves the reiteration of a same that is not identical with itself – a subjectivity that, paradoxically, *is as* perpetually becoming different from itself. Moreover, given Lacan’s understanding that ‘man’s desire is the Other’s desire’ (i.e., subjective desire is language-mediated – structured in accordance with the big Other as ‘locus of the word’), the ‘lack of being’ in question is not only that of the individual subject but also of the transindividual and Other field of language-mediated subjectivity. In short, language-mediated, subjective desire admits

⁴⁰² Ibid, 223.

consideration as an expression of a lack of being *in the Other* whereby the Other exists: it is not only the individual but also the big Other that is constitutively lacking.

In Lacan's work produced between *Seminar III* and 'Subversion of the Subject', the idea that subjectivity *is as* constitutively lacking is implicit, firstly, in the suggestion that the 'advent' of subjectivity is structurally synonymous with the rejection or expulsion 'into the real' of a 'primordial signifier'⁴⁰³, and secondly, in the proposition that the 'origin' of subjective desire is to be explained in terms of a 'primordially lost... metonymical... object of desire'.⁴⁰⁴ As elements proper to a *language-mediated* subjectivity, the excluded primordial *signifier* or *metonymical* object of desire also define that which is missing from, or impossible correlate to, the symbolic order, the big Other, the signifying chain – in accordance with which the symbolic order *is as* constitutively lacking. In Lacanian theory, the status of the symbolic order as constitutively lacking is, itself, symbolised as S(A) – the so-called 'signifier of a lack in the Other'⁴⁰⁵ – and, more controversially, conceived in terms of the 'phallus' or 'phallic function'.

⁴⁰³ For a reference to the notion of a radically excluded 'primordial signifier', see Lacan, *Seminar III*, 150-51.

It may be noted that, in conceptualising the constitutively lost primordial signifier or primordial object of desire synonymous with the mythical advent of language-mediated subjectivity, Lacan invokes various Freudian terms. Specifically, Lacan appropriates and reformulates the distinctions Freud makes between '*repression proper*' or *Verdrängung* (i.e., the psychical function of repression/overdetermination of meaning) and, respectively, *Urverdrängung* (so-called 'primal repression'), *Verwerfung* (rejection, exclusion), and *Bejahung/Ausstossung* (affirmation, taking things into oneself/expulsion, rejecting things from oneself). Equivalently, one may say that Lacan appropriates and reformulates the distinctions Freud makes between *Verdrängung* and that which admits consideration as (1) grounding or enlivening the possibility of these operations and/or (2) radically other than, outside, or beyond the terms of reference of these operations (i.e., to some degree, the distinctions Freud makes prefigure what is proper to the death instinct). An in-depth consideration of this material is beyond the scope of the present study. However, by way of providing further context for the Lacanian conception of a primordially lost signifier, I present an overview in section 8.8.

⁴⁰⁴ For a reference to a 'primordially lost... metonymical... object' see Lacan, *Seminar V*, Seminar 1, 6 November 1957, 5.

⁴⁰⁵ The symbolisation S(A) first appears in *ibid*, Seminar 17, 26 March 1958, 221. In Gallagher's translation it is rendered S(Ø). In *ibid*, *Seminar VI*, Seminar 16, 8 April 1959, 206, Lacan uses the intermediary symbolisation 'S(' in order to emphasise that in 'the big Other... the locus of the word... in which there reposes... the totality of the system of signifiers... something is missing.

Here, it should be reiterated that, in keeping with the definitions proposed in previous chapters, the so-called ‘primordial signifier’ ought *not* to be conceived literally as a positive, singular entity or being-present but rather as an infinity of pure differences or differential traces such that ‘the’ signifier is a ‘universe’ of signifiers. Strictly speaking, then, ‘the primordial signifier’ designates a primordial *trace structure* synonymous with the precipitation of subjectivity. Still further, it is also evident that, from a Lacanian perspective, the *primordial* signifier or object of desire is *mythical*. This is to reaffirm that there is no possibility of assuming a transcendental perspective from which to objectively interrogate the limits of language-mediated subjectivity. Hence, the advent or origin of this subjectivity must be regarded as a hypothesis, conveniently presupposed as a matter of logical and structural necessity. Thus, in *Seminar III*, Lacan admonishes his audience not to become overly ‘fascinated’ with the question of what is ‘Prior to all symbolization’, since it is a ‘priority... not temporal but logical’.⁴⁰⁶ Lacan also asserts that the ‘primordial signifier... quite precisely means nothing’ and insists that

I in no way believe that there is anywhere at all a moment a stage, at which the subject first acquires the primitive signifier, that subsequently the play of meanings is introduced, and that after that, signifier and signified having linked arms, we then enter the domain of discourse.⁴⁰⁷

Likewise, in *Seminar V*, Lacan refers to the ‘primordial level’ as the ‘mythical level of the first establishment of demand’ (i.e., the advent of language-mediated subjectivity)⁴⁰⁸,

Something which can be only a signifier is lacking to it.’ As Lacan goes on to point out, this implies that ‘there is no Other of the Other’ – that is to say, no transcendental guarantee of meaning, or, as noted in Evans, 110, no ‘metalanguage’ or ‘transcendental signified’. Subsequently, in Lacan, ‘The Subversion of the Subject’, 693, Lacan affirms that ‘S(A)’ is to be ‘read as: signifier of a lack in the Other, a lack inherent in the Other’s very function as the treasure trove of signifiers’ and reiterates that ‘The lack at stake is one I have already formulated: that there is no Other of the Other.’

⁴⁰⁶ Lacan, *Seminar III*, 81.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, 151.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, *Seminar V*, Seminar 5, 4 December 1957, 66. In the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the term ‘demand’ merits further explanation. Whilst this is an over-simplification, for the

and characterises the ‘metonymical object’, variously, as ‘this famous object that never is, that object which is always situated elsewhere, that is always something else’,⁴⁰⁹ and as ‘a primordial object which remains without any doubt to dominate the subsequent life of the subject’ that, by virtue of being ‘caught up in the function... of the signifier... is a signification which always slides, slips away and conceals itself’.⁴¹⁰

4.3.3 The circulation of desire

Insofar as the Lacanian model of subjective desire admits consideration as an impetus to recover a primordially lost founding object, moment, or condition of being (in accordance with which subjectivity *is as* constitutively lacking), desire testifies to the order of the real-as-impossibility that is synonymous with, yet inassimilable to, language-mediated expressions of subjectivity. However, insofar as subjective desire admits consideration as a repetitive movement among signifying alternatives (or determined objects) such that ‘desire... is caught in the rails of metonymy, eternally extending toward the *desire for something else*’, desire bears witness to the order of the possible in language-mediated expressions of subjectivity – i.e., the aforementioned tension between the conscious and unconscious dimensions of the signifying chain, ensuring that any posited signified/determined object is sustained only in its ambiguity. In *Seminar IX*, Lacan invokes the topological properties of the torus and the cross-cap of the projective plane in order to articulate, within a single frame of reference, the manner by which the structure of subjective desire reflects the structurally necessary counterpoise of possibility and impossibility proper to language-mediated expressions of subjectivity. By way of elaborating these figures, let us begin with a consideration of the torus and then proceed to address the cross-cap.

purposes of the present discussion, demand may be considered synonymous with that aspect of subjective desire expressed (or, indeed, expressible) in language. For further discussion of this point, see Evans, 34-35.

⁴⁰⁹ Lacan, *Seminar V*, Seminar 1, 6 November 1957, 9.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid, Seminar 12, 5 February 1958, 166.

Prefiguring Lacan's consideration of the torus is his characterisation of subjective desire in terms of a cyclical impetus to recover an irremediably lost origin. Thus, Lacan suggests that 'what we are dealing with in the automatism of repetition is... a cycle', where, moreover,

...what the automatism of repetition means... is... the fact... that if a determined cycle... was only that very one... designated by a certain signifier... [then] the behaviour repeats itself in order to make re-emerge this signifier that it is as such.⁴¹¹

In other words, the 'end' or 'aim' of desire, considered as a cyclical automatism/metonymy/repetition, is to sustain the identity and meaning of an originary same through the repression of difference. However, as previously noted, given the reciprocity of metonymic and metaphoric functions in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, the *same* meaning that *is as* reiterated also is sustained *only in its ambiguity* in the form of an endless movement among signifying alternatives. Lacan refers to this as the 'paradox of the automatism of repetition' – namely, that it 'introduces into the cycle of its repetitions – always the same in their essence and therefore concerning something which is always the same thing – difference, distinctiveness, unicity'.⁴¹² This paradoxical simultaneity of identity and difference also is apparent in Lacan's subsequent characterisation of the unary trait (i.e., the essence of the signifier; the 'hidden', metaphoric function of pure difference that 'grounds' significant insistence) as 'the unicity as such of the circuit (*tour*) in repetition.'⁴¹³ As previously suggested, the trace-like character of the unary trait (i.e., as 'that' which is encountered *as* effaced, presencing *as* absence, appearing *as* disappeared) ensures that there is no possibility of attaining what Lacan refers to as the 'goal' or 'plan' of subjective desire – namely, 'of making the original unary re-emerge from one of its circuits.'⁴¹⁴ Indeed, in

⁴¹¹ Ibid, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 5, 13 December 1961, 44.

⁴¹² Ibid, 46.

⁴¹³ Ibid, Seminar 12, 7 March 1962, 115.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

acknowledgement of this fact, Lacan suggests that ‘The subject as such is minus one... starting from... the unary trait *qua* excluded’.⁴¹⁵

Having characterised subjective desire as a cyclical impetus to recover an ‘origin’ that is, fundamentally, effaced and excluded, Lacan invokes the figure of the torus in order to demonstrate that ‘there is a topological structure... necessarily that of the subject, which means that there are certain of its loops which cannot be reduced.’⁴¹⁶ Elaborating this model, Lacan identifies two broad categories of irreducible loops: ‘empty circles’ defining *toroidal* paths (i.e., circulations around the toroidal void) and ‘full circles’ defining *poloidal* paths (i.e., rings spiralling around the tube of the torus – like the windings on an electric coil).⁴¹⁷ Lacan proposes that the empty circles bear some relation to ‘the function of desire’ and, indeed, express ‘the unconscious minus one in its constitutive function.’⁴¹⁸ In the context of Lacan’s discussion, the ‘emptiness’ of the toroidal circles can be understood, firstly, as a testament to the status of the ‘original unary’ (i.e., the primordial ground of subjectivity) *as* effaced, *as* excluded (i.e., a pure difference, exemplifying what has been called the structurally necessary real-as-impossible synonymous with, yet inassimilable to, the function of representation/symbolisation), and thus the impossibility of achieving the aim of desire – namely, the recovery of the founding object, moment, or condition of being of subjectivity. Secondly, then, the empty centres of the circles also offer to symbolise the nature of the said founding object, moment, or condition of being *as* constitutively lost, and thus the nature of subjective desire as an expression of subjectivity that *is as* constitutively lacking.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, 117.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, 121.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, 120-22.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, 123.

By contrast, the full circles are characterised as ‘circles of demand’⁴¹⁹, which ‘series of circuits... carry out... the unary repetition of what returns and what characterises the primary subject in his signifying, automatism of repetition relationship.’⁴²⁰ In order to understand Lacan’s meaning, it is necessary to bear in mind that, as circles of *demand*, the poloidal circles define the order of the possible – that part of subjective desire which *can* be expressed in language in accordance with the function of representation/symbolisation (which is to say, in accordance with the aforementioned tension between the conscious and the unconscious dimensions of the signifying chain). As noted in section 4.1, the metonymic function implies that meanings posited or objects determined are (1) *as* reiterated, and (2), by virtue of the insistent return of the repressed, sustained only in their ambiguity. The first point affirms that repetition *per se* is intrinsic to positing meaning/determining objects. The second point affirms that this repetition takes the form of a movement among signifying alternatives or determined objects. Thus, the ‘unary repetition of what returns’ implies that the succession of poloidal circuits around the solid body of the torus (equivalent to meanings posited, objects determined, *in consciousness*) are, themselves, disposed along a wider toroidal circulation around the central void (namely, the ‘original unary’ that expresses ‘the unconscious minus one in its constitutive function’).⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Ibid, 122.

⁴²¹ Further support for the interpretation being advanced for Lacan’s ‘empty’, toroidal circles of ‘desire’ and ‘full’, poloidal circles of ‘demand’ may be found in *ibid*, Seminar 15, 28 March 1962, 149. Here, Lacan observes, firstly, that, with regard to the poloidal circles,

...the circuit of what one could call the generating circle of the torus, since it is a torus of revolution in so far as it is open to being indefinitely repeated, in some way the same and always different, is well designed to represent... the signifying insistence and especially the insistence of repetitive demand.

Secondly, with tacit reference to the toroidal circulation, Lacan suggests:

On the other hand what is implied in this succession of circuits, namely a circularity that is accomplished while at the same time being unnoticed by the subject... is found to offer us... [a] symbolisation for... what is implied in... unconscious desire, in so far as the subject follows its highways and byways without knowing it. Throughout all these demands, this unconscious desire is in a way by itself the metonymy of all these demands...

4.3.4 The irreducible residue of desire

With regard to the mythical, founding object, moment, or condition of being of language-mediated subjectivity, Lacan's topological reflections demonstrate that subjective desire is not only conceivable in terms of an impetus to *recover* that which is primordially lost but also to *resolve* that which is fundamentally irreducible. At first glance, this proposition seems beset with contradiction. Even considered separately, 'that' which (1) *is as* lost and (2) *is as* irreducible defy logic. After all, how *can* something be *as* not-being, presence *as* absence, appear *as* disappeared? Similarly, how *can* some *thing* (i.e., a being that is, ostensibly, discrete, delineated, resolved, determined) be *as* irresolvable, indeterminable? With respect to expressions of subjective desire, Lacanian theory not only demands that these impossibilities be accepted on their own terms but also that they define a certain equivalence. Thus, logically and structurally, 'that' which *is as* lost is synonymous with 'that' which *is as* irreducible. However, as signalled by placing 'that' in quotation marks, the amelioration of this antinomy follows from the understanding that, strictly speaking, there is *no* literal or actual founding object, moment, or condition of being, in relation to which desire arises and towards which desire is irresistibly impelled. 'That' which *is as* primordially lost and 'that' which *is as* irreducible residue is neither a metaphysical entity nor an expression of such. Strictly speaking, then, there is *no* literal or actual *object* of desire: in consciousness, there is only the positing of a succession of signifying alternatives sustained in their ambiguity; only the advancing of a series of imaginary surrogates coveted in their sophistry or speciousness.

The idea that subjective desire involves an impetus to resolve a founding object, moment, or condition of being that is fundamentally irreducible is already implicit in Lacan's references to the so-called *caput mortuum* of the signifying chain (this follows

Also relevant is Seminar 13, 14 March 1962, 134, where Lacan equates the 'elided circle... the empty circle' with 'the metonymical object beneath all these demands' and 'the object of desire'.

from the definition of *caput mortuum* as a term designating the residual products of alchemical processes). Indeed, the irreducibility of the *caput mortuum* is simply another way of saying that it is the structurally necessary, real-as-impossibility synonymous with, yet *inassimilable to*, the function of representation/symbolisation. Topologically speaking, this real-as-impossibility also is expressed in the ‘irreducibility’ of the toroidal and poloidal circulations of the torus. Whilst Lacan’s precise meaning on this point is somewhat ambiguous, I would suggest that the irreducibility of the toroidal path follows from its disposition around an empty centre. Given that, in the limit, there is *nothing* to which the toroidal circuit may be reduced, any reduction can be sustained indefinitely. The irreducibility of the poloidal circulation can be understood in terms of the resistance to deformation of the ‘body’ of the torus. From this perspective, the reduction of a poloidal path to a point would be equivalent to the absolute positing of a signified or the absolute determination of an object. That this reduction is impossible is affirmed in ‘The Instance of the Letter’, where Lacan defines the ‘metonymic structure’ of language-mediated subjectivity in terms of ‘the irreducible nature of the resistance of signification’.⁴²² In consequence, the poloidal circulations are fated to eternally wind around the body of the torus – like a coil employing a wire of infinitesimal thickness (i.e., the succession of poloidal circulations never complete their toroidal orbit – a completion of this kind being equivalent to realising the objective or, indeed, *object* of desire by ‘making the original unary re-emerge’).

In Lacanian theory, the idea that subjective desire involves an impetus to resolve an irreducible founding object, moment, or condition of being is, perhaps, more familiarly expressed in relation to what is termed *objet petit a* – the so-called ‘object... cause of desire’. Whilst this expression first appears in *Seminar XI*, its essential features are already present in *Seminar IX*, where (in Gallagher’s translation) it is rendered as ‘little o’. Here, Lacan articulates little o in topological terms as the irreducible remainder resulting from ‘cutting’ the four-dimensional surface known as the ‘cross-cap of the projective plane’ along the redoubled path of the so-called ‘interior eight’. By way of

⁴²² Ibid, ‘The Instance of the Letter’, 428.

concluding this section's engagement with Lacan's theory of desire, I elaborate each of these elements in turn, beginning with the 'cut'. In so doing, it will be convenient, on occasion (whether in footnotes or in the main body of my text), to supplement and summarise Lacan's ruminations with the aid of Juan-David Nasio's lucid commentary in '*Objet a* and the Cross-cap' (1987).⁴²³

In the first place, then, Lacan invokes the figure of the interior eight in order to symbolise the antinomy proper to the essence of the signifier as an identity-in-difference – namely, that, in the 'relationship of the signifier to itself... a signifier cannot signify itself... the signifier in so far as it can be used to signify itself has to be posed as different to itself.'⁴²⁴ Relevant, in this regard, is Lacan's insistence that the figure of the interior eight is not to be interpreted merely as a circle within a circle, where the 'inside circle touches on the limit constituted by the outside circle.' On the contrary, and in keeping with the problematic of the signifier that offers to signify itself, Lacan proposes to construct the interior eight as an unbroken and redoubled trace so that 'the line... of the outside circle continues into the line of the inside circle and finds itself here.'⁴²⁵ Thus conceived, the figure of the interior eight illustrates the paradoxical status of the signifier as that which is, simultaneously, 'inside' *and* 'outside', 'identical to' *and* 'different from'

⁴²³ See Juan-David Nasio, '*Objet a* and the Cross-cap', trans David Pettigrew and Francois Raffoul, in Ellie Ragland and Dragan Milovanovic (eds), *Lacan: Topologically Speaking* (New York: Other Press, 2004, originally published in Juan-David Nasio, *Les Yeux de Laure: le concept d'objet a dans la théorie de J. Lacan suivi d'une introduction à la topologie psychanalytique* (Paris: Aubier, 1987), 193-217), 98-116. Readers of French also may consult Jeanne Granon-La Font, *La topologie ordinaire de Jacques Lacan* (Paris: Point Hors Ligne, 1985). For an unofficial, English language translation of this text, see Jack W. Stone, 'The Ordinary Topology of Jacques Lacan', nd, listed as 'Topology (zipfile)', *Jack W. Stone's Joyce/Lacan/SintHome Page*, <http://web.missouri.edu/~stonej/t67894312xxxv.html> (16.04.14). For some other sources that discuss/illustrate the topological properties of the cross-cap in elementary terms, see Claire Irving, 'Making the real projective plane' in *The Mathematical Gazette*, v89, n516, November 2005, 417-19, John W. Woll, Jr., 'One-Sided Surfaces and Orientability' in *The Two-Year College Mathematics Journal*, v2, n1, Spring 1971, 7-8, and Robert C. James, 'Combinational Topology of Surfaces' in *Mathematics Magazine*, v29, n1 (September – October 1955), 2-3.

⁴²⁴ Lacan, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 17, 11 April 1962, 176.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid*, 175.

‘itself’ – a logical aporia in harmony with the conception of the unary trait or ‘essence’ of the signifier as being of the order of the real-as-impossible.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁶ By way of elaborating the logical conundrums that arise in relation to the essence of the signifier as an identity-in-difference, Lacan refers to Russell’s Paradox – a well-known problem in set theory. Thus, in *ibid*, 175-76, Lacan suggests that the outer circle represents the set of sets that do not include themselves ($E^{\neg E}$), whilst the inner circle represents the set of sets that do include themselves (E^E). The paradox arises when one considers the following problem:

...should one or should one not include these sets which do not include themselves in the set of sets which do not include themselves?... If yes, then they include themselves in the set of sets which do not include themselves. if not, we find ourselves confronted with an analogous impasse. (175)

That is to say, if the answer is ‘yes’ then, immediately, the inclusion is invalidated insofar as it produces a set that now includes itself. If the answer is ‘no’ then a similar difficulty arises insofar as a set that does not include itself should, by definition, be a member of the set of sets that do not include themselves. It may be noted that, in the context of *Seminar IX*, Lacan provides a more detailed account of Russell’s Paradox in Seminar 9, 24 January 1962, 89-90. For a primary reference to the antinomy in question, see Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (London: Allen & Unwin Ltd, and New York: The Macmillan Co., 1919), 136.

The paradoxical status of the essence of the signifier as an identity-in-difference is emphasised, further, when Lacan applies the redoubled line of the interior eight to the torus. As noted above, the figure of the torus provides a useful illustration of the manner by which the field of language-mediated subjectivity defines a counterpoise between possibility and impossibility – poloidal circulations being synonymous with the order of the possible (i.e., the tension between the conscious and the unconscious dimensions of the signifying chain) and toroidal circulations being synonymous with the order of the impossible (i.e., the real). Here, what is relevant is that the closed surface of the torus eludes categorisation in terms of inside/outside. Thus, as Lacan observes, whether one ‘cuts’ the torus poloidally or toroidally, ‘The torus will remain entirely intact in the form of a pipe or of a sleeve if you wish.’ Topologically speaking, the ‘two types of circle... are the same... [they] do not define an inside and an outside’ (Seminar 17, 11 April, 1962, 178). Moreover, as Lacan points out with the aid of a few diagrams, the interior eight can be used to model, along a single path, the poloidal ‘windings’ around the torus (i.e., ‘full’ circles of demand), the succession of which defines a toroidal circulation (i.e., an ‘empty’ circle of desire). Hence, as Lacan puts it, ‘the two loops represent the reiteration, the reduplication of demand and so involve this field of difference to itself, of self-difference’ (183).

In the context of Lacan’s topological ruminations, further clarification of the significance of the interior eight may be found in Nasio. As Nasio points out, the ‘two loops of the... interior eight represent... the different moments of the repetition of the signifier.’ Indeed, in harmony with the Lacanian proposition that, always already, subjectivity is language-mediated, Nasio insists that the interior eight is that which enables the very possibility of thinking repetition: ‘We take the folded eight; we *think* repetition *with* it’ (104). Still further, Nasio demonstrates how the interior eight can be used to illustrate the manner by which meaning (1) involves a retroactive determination, the very possibility of which is, itself, (2) a function of the unary trait. Here, Nasio’s commentary resonates with what was previously observed in chapter two with regard to Lacan’s suggestion (in *Seminar V*) that ‘the signifier and the signified are ‘always out of phase to

Secondly, Lacan models the function of the unary trait implicated in what has been termed the *structuring of structure* or the *figuring of desire* by applying the redoubled cut or tracing of the interior eight to the surface of a four-dimensional figure: the cross-cap of the projective plane. Naturally, from the perspective of three-dimensional beings, the four-dimensionality of the cross-cap is conceivable only theoretically. However, it is possible to visualise the cross-cap in three-dimensional projection. From this perspective, the cross-cap may be apprehended as follows: take a deflated, rubber inner tube, pressed flat along its length. Cut the inner tube across its width – this will produce a long, flattened, rubber pipe or sleeve. Twist this sleeve once and reconnect its ends to generate a Möbius surface (which, it may be noted, is ‘handed’ in accordance with the direction of the originating twist). Now, re-inflate the inner tube until the interior void almost disappears. The result will resemble a torus, the central vacancy of which has been reduced to a point, and from which place there issues a pinching fold. Nasio refers to this feature as the ‘suture line’ or ‘self-intersecting line’, and observes that, in dimensions higher than three, the surface of the cross-cap does *not* intersect itself: ‘the line exists in the concrete cross-cap and does not with the abstract cross-cap.’⁴²⁷ Nasio also points out that, in *Seminar IX*, Lacan’s topological modelling of the structure of subjective desire by way of the properties of the cross-cap is complicated by the fact that this figure (or, to be

a certain degree’ – this ‘phase difference’ bestowing on any posited meaning or signified ‘something which is essentially metonymical’. Thus, Nasio proposes that ‘The first loop schematizes simply the movement that we know as the *deferred affect*.’ That is to say, it is only on completing this loop that there is enlivened, retroactively, the possibility of registering a repetition – of being able to ‘count a before and an after, or rather a first, a second and an *n*th time’. That this retroactive determination of meaning is, itself, enabled by the function of the unary trait is evident from Nasio’s assertion that ‘The large loop encompassing the small one represents the operation of counting itself, the element that makes calculus possible, that is the trace of writing’ (105). However, in keeping with the status of the unary trait as the function of pure difference that is of the order of the real-as-impossible, Nasio also acknowledges that ‘This element – the trace of writing – that is indispensable to the constitution of a series of numbers, is not... itself reducible to a number. It is outside the series, or, if you will, outside of the repetitive succession’ (105-06).

⁴²⁷ Nasio, 99. Support for Nasio’s interpretation of the cross-cap may be found in Lacan, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 20, 16 May 1962, where it is stated that the cross-cap ‘brings into play at the least the fourth dimension’ (220) and ‘the important thing in this figure is that this line of penetration should be held by you to be null and void’ (223).

precise, that which is produced from it by virtue of the cut of the interior eight) is invoked in both its three- *and* four-dimensional aspects.⁴²⁸

With regard to the cutting of the figure of the cross-cap along the line of the interior eight, Lacan makes the following, key propositions: (1) ‘a signifier, in its most radical essence’ is conceivable ‘simply as a cut... in a surface’⁴²⁹, (2) ‘the subject has the structure of a surface at least topologically defined’ so that ‘It is a matter of grasping... how the cut engenders the surface’⁴³⁰ (i.e., how the unary trait is implicated in the advent of language-mediated subjectivity), and (3) there are certain ‘figures’ whose ‘privileged properties’ will provide a way to understand the ‘relationship of the subject to the object of desire’.⁴³¹ In seeking to understand Lacan’s meaning, one must appreciate that the ‘cut’ in question is not a cut *in* any kind of actual, literal, material space or substance. Rather, the term ‘cut’ is employed to characterise the *function* of pure difference or lettering/tracing/differencing proper to the unary trait. Moreover, one also must take cognizance of the fact the ‘products’ of the cut (i.e., the ‘figures’ that possess ‘privileged properties’) are neither metaphysical entities nor expressions of such. Finally, in keeping with the thematic previously introduced in order to think Lacan’s conception of subjective desire, I would suggest that the *relationship* between the figures produced by virtue of the cutting of the cross-cap is synonymous with the *counterpoise* of the order of the possible and the order of the impossible that, as a matter of logical and structural necessity, is proper to language-mediated expressions of subjectivity – which is to say, the structure of subjective desire.

⁴²⁸ As noted in Nasio, 100,

We see that the cross-cap relevant to psychoanalysis is not the concrete one that we have constructed in three dimensions, nor the abstract one that exists in algebraic formulas, but the conjunction of the two.

⁴²⁹ Lacan, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 20, 16 May 1962, 224.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid*, Seminar 22, 30 May 1962, 240.

⁴³¹ *Ibid*, Seminar 23, 6 June 1962, 259.

How is this so? As Nasio observes, the figures produced by cutting the cross-cap along the path of the interior eight comprise

...two surfaces: one equivalent to the Möbius strip that Lacan identifies as the new subject and the other equivalent to a disk identified with *objet a*. In short to cut the cross-cap... [along] the line of the interior eight constitutes the gesture that spatially materialises or represents the fact that the repetition produces a subject and leaves a residue.⁴³²

Nasio also refers to the disk as a ‘conch’ that follows a ‘spiraling movement’ (at least, in three-dimensional projection).⁴³³ In harmony with Nasio’s interpretation, in *Seminar IX*, Lacan asserts that the ‘double cut’ of the interior eight ‘always divides the surface called the cross-cap in two’, one of which is, indeed, identified as ‘a Möbius surface.’⁴³⁴ Rather less clearly, Lacan describes the other surface (i.e., the surface equivalent to \underline{O}) as the ‘central piece, isolated by the double cut’ and proposes that it is a

...figure... [that] is exemplary... [in allowing us] to find the relationship of \$ cut of \underline{O} , the formalisation of the phantasy in its relationship with something which is inscribed in what is the remainder of the surface called the projective plane or cross-cap when the central piece is in a way enucleated.⁴³⁵

In order to unravel Lacan’s meaning, it is necessary to define the terms ‘\$’, ‘ \underline{O} ’, ‘phantasy’, and to qualify the expression ‘\$ cut of \underline{O} ’ as the ‘formalisation of the phantasy’. In the first place, then, and as Lacan states in *Seminar V*, \$ symbolises the ‘barred... subject...namely, *qua* marked by the effect of the signifier... split by the

⁴³² Nasio, 107-08.

⁴³³ Ibid, 110.

⁴³⁴ Lacan, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 23, 6 June 1962, 269.

⁴³⁵ Ibid, Seminar 24, 13 June 1962, 280-81. In *Seminar IX*, Lacan’s derivation of little \underline{O} is dense and, at times, convoluted. For a more concise summary of what results from cutting the cross-cap, see *ibid*, *Seminar X*, 95-99.

Spaltung... [splitting, division] which results from the action of the signifier'.⁴³⁶ That is to say, \$ is neither a metaphysical entity nor an expression of such but rather that which reflects the tension between the conscious and the unconscious dimensions of the signifying chain, and thus corresponds to the order of the possible in expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making. Equivalently, one may say that \$ defines subjectivity in terms of an alienating tension or split between the individual 'one that is conscious' and the *transindividual* Otherness of language-mediated, social and cultural reality, the greater part of which is, practically speaking, repressed and, therefore, unconscious. Still further, \$ may be said to reflect the fact that the metaphoric dimension of the precipitation of meaning is 'hidden' – always already subsumed within the *appearance* of a perpetual, metonymic, re-playing of meaning (i.e., a repetitive movement among signifying alternatives, determined objects, imaginary surrogates). In Lacan's cutting of the cross-cap along the line of the interior eight, \$ designates the surface equivalent to a Möbius strip – which Nasio also refers to as the 'new subject' or 'the subject of the unconscious'.⁴³⁷

Secondly, in defining \underline{o} , it is necessary to distinguish between what Lacan refers to as 'little \underline{o} ' and 'little o'. Notwithstanding some ambiguities in the transcript of *Seminar IX*, it would appear that the former term designates the 'object' that corresponds to the order of the real-as-impossible in language-mediated expressions of subjectivity. The latter term designates the posited signified or determined object that, in consciousness, serves as an imaginary surrogate for \underline{o} .⁴³⁸ Thus, subsequent to the lecture in which the Freudian game of hide and seek was pantomimed with the aid of a ping-pong ball (i.e., the 'little o'

⁴³⁶ Ibid, *Seminar V*, Seminar 25, 11 June 1958, 324. See also Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 41, where \$ is characterised as that which bears witness to the 'death sentence of the *subject of the unconscious*... the subject as barred by language, as alienated within the Other'.

⁴³⁷ Nasio, 103, 104, 108. More precisely, \$ designates the 'new' divided/barred subjectivity precipitated by virtue of the operation of the subject of the unconscious.

⁴³⁸ In terms of the distinction between drive and desire noted in the thesis Introduction, one might say that, in consciousness, 'o' signifies the imaginary drive object or part object. By contrast ' \underline{o} ', as the ineffable object *cause* of desire, defines the 'geometry' of the 'space' within which are posited driven subjects, drive objects, and their relative trajectories.

identified in consciousness), Lacan refers to ‘the little o, the object which... corresponds to demand... the object of desire’⁴³⁹ and (alluding to the ‘fading’ that is proper to all expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making, by virtue of which determinations of meaning are sustained only in their ambiguity) to

...the metonymical object of desire, the one in which every object represents this elective little o, in which the subject loses himself, when this object comes to metaphorical birth, when we come to substitute it for the subject who, in the demand has a syncope, has fainted...⁴⁴⁰

Indeed, that the object of desire is of the order of the real-as-impossible is further evident where, in response to the rhetorical question, ‘What is the o’, Lacan proposes:

Let us put in its place the little ping-pong ball, namely nothing, anything at all, any support whatsoever of the alternating operation of the subject in the *Fort-Da*.⁴⁴¹

In other words, ‘What is involved is not simply the presence or the absence of small o, but the conjunction of the two, the cut.’⁴⁴² That is to say, o is neither a metaphysical entity nor an expression of such but rather that which is invoked in order to think the real-as-impossible, metaphoric function of pure difference proper to the operation of the unary trait.

As noted in the thesis Introduction, on the level of consciousness and ego, *fantasy* inheres in repetitively positing a series of imaginary surrogates for the primordially lost/fundamentally irreducible object of desire, thereby sustaining a false sense of identity and sufficiency. The expression ‘\$ cut of o’, as the ‘formalisation of the phantasy’, may be understood with reference to the algorithm Lacan writes ‘\$ ◇ o’, and his assertion that

⁴³⁹ Lacan, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 9, 24 January 1962, 83.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, 91.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Ibid, 92.

The quadrilateral polygon originates the torus and the cross-cap... this shape \diamond , stamp, desire, uniting the \$ to the \underline{o} in the \$ \diamond \underline{o} ... this little quadrilateral should be read: the subject *qua* marked by the signifier is properly in the phantasy, the cut of \underline{o} .⁴⁴³

On the basis of the preceding discussion it should be clear that there is no question of taking literally the idea that ‘ \diamond , stamp, desire... originates the torus and the cross-cap’ (that is to say, conceiving of subjective desire as a ‘substantial’, metaphysical-dynamical force giving rise to or effecting actual, material entities). On the contrary, I would suggest that Lacan is, rather, referring to the efficacy of these topological figures for modelling the structure of subjective desire. Similarly, ‘ \diamond , stamp, desire uniting the \$ to the \underline{o} in the \$ \diamond \underline{o} ’ affirms that, in language-mediated expressions of subjectivity, \$ and \underline{o} are *theoretical* figures on which basis one models the structure of subjective desire (i.e., either algorithmically in the expression \$ \diamond \underline{o} , or topologically in terms of the cutting of the cross-cap along the line of the interior eight). The remainder of Lacan’s pithy comment may be restated: ‘in the phantasy, \$ is the cut of \underline{o} ’. That is to say, the repetitive positing of imaginary surrogates for \underline{o} (i.e., the phantasy) evinces the structure of subjective desire in the form of a counterpoise between the order of the possible (i.e., \$ as the subjectivity defined in terms of the tension obtaining between the conscious and the unconscious dimensions of the signifying chain) and the order of the real-as-impossible (i.e., the ‘cut of \underline{o} ’, which, itself, admits the equivalent formulation: ‘that’ which, in accordance with the function of the unary trait, is the conjunction of the presence and the absence, or the insistence of the identity-in-difference, of the object of desire).

By way of anticipating matters for discussion in chapter six, it may be appropriate to specify in greater detail the meaning of the so-called ‘formalisation of the phantasy’: \$ \diamond \underline{o} (or \$ \diamond *a*). In this regard, *Seminar XI* and *Seminar XIV* are of particular relevance.⁴⁴⁴ In *Seminar XI*, Lacan explores the ‘relation between the subject and the Other’ in terms of

⁴⁴³ Ibid, Seminar 20, 16 May 1962, 227. Here, I would suggest that, in Gallagher’s transcript, the reference to the ‘cut of o’ ought to read ‘cut of \underline{o} ’.

⁴⁴⁴ A highly readable introduction to the ideas presented in these two *Seminar* may be found in Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* (see, especially, 42-63).

‘two operations’ – namely, ‘alienation’ and ‘separation’.⁴⁴⁵ In the former case, subjectivity is conceived in terms of a necessary relation between ‘Being (the subject)’ and ‘Meaning (the Other)’ such that to be *as a subject* is to be *as a subject of meaning* – which is to say, a subject *of* language. In this sense, language-mediated subjectivity is alienated insofar as one’s sense of self is, necessarily, defined in accordance with or, indeed, *given to one*, by an Other. In the latter case, subjectivity is conceived in terms of desire as that which ‘emerges from the superimposition of two lacks’ defining ‘the desire of the subject and the desire of the Other’.⁴⁴⁶ The crucial point to grasp is that, on this account, subjectivity is conceived in terms of that which precipitates as two, empty, intersecting sets: the individual subject (or ‘one that is conscious’) and the big Other (i.e., language-mediated, social and cultural reality, the greater part of which is, practically speaking, repressed and, therefore, unconscious). As Lacan’s diagrammatic representation illustrates, the intersection of the two empty sets may be designated ‘non-meaning’, thereby alluding to that which exceeds and eludes (or which is of the order of the real-as-impossible in) expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making – namely, *objet petit a*.⁴⁴⁷ In the language of *Seminar IX*, these two, empty, intersecting sets are precisely synonymous with $\$ \diamond \underline{0}$. That is, the engendering (one also might say *figuring*) of ‘\$’ as the ‘cut of $\underline{0}$ ’ or, equivalently, the manner by which language-mediated expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making emerge in the form of a structurally necessary counterpoise between the order of the possible (\$) and the order of the impossible (the cut of $\underline{0}$).

In *Seminar XIV*, this interpretation of $\$ \diamond a$ is reiterated by way of an inversion of the Cartesian *cogito*. Thus, Lacan invokes the formula ‘*Either I am not thinking or I am not (Ou je ne pense pas ou je ne suis pas)*’ in order to elaborate the ‘point of crystallisation for the subject of the unconscious’ or, equivalently, ‘the revelation of something which is

⁴⁴⁵ See Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 209, 210-13, 213-15.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, 214, 215.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid, 211.

the truth of the structure... the **o**-object' – i.e., *objet petit a*.⁴⁴⁸ Again, Lacan models subjectivity in terms of the intersection of two negatives or empty sets: 'I am not thinking' and 'I am not'. Here, as Fink points out, the 'thinking' in question admits consideration as an expression of the unconscious.⁴⁴⁹ From this perspective, the set 'I am not thinking' corresponds to conscious determinations of meaning sustained by virtue of the repression of meaning potentials that are unconscious. By the same token, the set 'I am not' corresponds to the return of repressed meaning potentials, in relation to which conscious determinations of meaning (including one's sense of oneself as a conscious ego) are fading. On this basis, the space of intersection between the two, empty sets may be said to represent what is proper to the function of repression/return, insistence/fading – namely, *figuring* considered in terms of the metaphoric function of pure difference or the lettering/tracing/differencing that defines the operation of the unary trait. In this way, Lacan reaffirms his understanding of subjectivity as that which precipitates in the form of a structurally necessary counterpoise between the order of the possible (\$) and the order of the impossible (the cut of o).

Having established that the relationship between the products of the cutting of the cross-cap along the line of the interior eight (i.e., \$ and o) is synonymous with the counterpoise of possibility and impossibility that, as a matter of structural necessity, is proper to language-mediated expressions of subjectivity and the structure of subjective desire, it now remains to establish the status of o as topologically irresolvable or irreducible. In this regard, the surface equivalent to o possesses two critical properties. In the first place, as Nasio observes, considered in three-dimensional projection, the conch- or disk-shaped surface equivalent to o and the surface equivalent to a Möbius strip (i.e., \$) retain 'the portion of the self-intersecting line that originally pinched them when they

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XIV. The Logic of Phantasy, 1966-1967*, unpublished transcript in Gallagher (trans), *Jacques Lacan in Ireland, Collected Translations and Papers*, <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/14-Logic-of-Phantasy-Complete.pdf>, (17.08.12), Seminar 5, 14 December 1966, 58, and Seminar 7, 11 January 1967, 78.

⁴⁴⁹ Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 44.

belonged to...[the cross-cap]’.⁴⁵⁰ However, with regard to the aforementioned ‘point hole’ of the cross-cap, ‘the conch retains the point within it, whilst the... Möbius strip... does not.’⁴⁵¹ This anomalous point hole testifies to the irreducibility of the surface equivalent to \mathcal{O} : it can be made infinitesimally small, but never absolutely eliminated. In *Seminar IX*, Lacan refers to this singularity as the ‘irreducible draught-hole’ which ‘if we ring it with a cut... is properly where there belongs, in the effects of the signifying function, \mathcal{O} , the object as such.’ As Lacan relates, further, ‘This means that the object is missed, because in no case could there be anything here but the contour of the object’.⁴⁵² Here, one encounters a resonance with Žižek’s suggestion that ‘the object-cause of desire resides in the *curved space of desire*’. In other words, \mathcal{O} is grasped neither as a metaphysical entity nor as an expression of such – rather ‘it’ defines the topological *structure* within which, so to speak, the *trajectory* (or, better perhaps, *orbit*) of subjective desire bears witness to the repetitive positing of an endless series of signifying alternatives or imaginary surrogates for \mathcal{O} . Still further, Lacan characterises the cross-cap as ‘the place of the hole’ – a ‘surface... particularly suitable to make function before us this most ungraspable element which is called desire as such, in other words lack’⁴⁵³ and suggests that

We know the functions and the nature of this privileged point: it is the phallus... in so far as it is through it as operator that an object o can be put at the same place where in another structure (the torus) we only grasp its contour. This is the exemplary value of the structure of the cross-cap...⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵⁰ Nasio, 108.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid, 111. See also Lacan, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 23, 6 June 1962, 267. Here, discussing the point hole of the cross-cap, Lacan affirms that ‘it is in one of the two parts by which the projective plane is divided by the double cut. It belongs to this part which is detached [i.e., the conch-shaped surface equivalent to \mathcal{O}], it does not belong to the part that remains [i.e., the Möbius surface equivalent to \mathcal{S}].’

⁴⁵² Lacan, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 21, 23 May 1962, 234.

⁴⁵³ Lacan, *Seminar IX*, Seminar 21, 23 May 1962, 235.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid, 236-37.

That is to say, the point hole of the cross-cap, irreducibly preserved in the surface equivalent to $\underline{0}$, represents the primordially lost metonymical object of desire or the signifier $S(A)$, in accordance with which language-mediated subjectivity *is as* constitutively lacking – i.e., desiring. To this extent, one finds an exemplary illustration of the manner by which *objet petit a* testifies to the object of desire as a structural simultaneity of lack *and* irreducibility.

Secondly, the irreducibility of the surface equivalent to $\underline{0}$ follows from the fact that, unlike the Möbius surface equivalent to $\$$, it is, as Lacan puts it, ‘something which is... not... specularisable’, where ‘being specularisable... [involves] irreducibility to the specular image’.⁴⁵⁵ In other words, a specular object is that for which it is possible to define a *mirror image* – a laterally inverted other to which the specular object cannot be reduced or, to employ more precise language, *transformed*. Hence, that which is *not* specularisable or *non-specular* *can* be transposed onto its mirror image via a continuous, geometric transformation. That is to say, always already, it *is* its mirror image or, rather, it has *no* mirror image. With regard to the surface equivalent to $\underline{0}$, Nasio expresses the matter as follows: ‘The disk can deform itself without tearing or scarring and adopt the exact same spatial disposition as the image in the mirror. At that point it no longer has an image.’⁴⁵⁶ The suggestion that the conch-shaped disk signifying little $\underline{0}$ has no mirror image implies that $\underline{0}$ has no representation/symbolisation other than itself and, in that sense, is irreducible.

Let us summarise the main points of the preceding two thesis chapters. I have sought to clarify the nature of painting, considered as an expression of an ambiguous and contradictory subjectivity/meaning-making, by posing two basic questions: (1) *how does the meaning of painting come into being?* and (2) *how is the meaning of painting sustained?* In the course of my deliberations, I have appealed to Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to present an understanding of painting as an expression of subjectivity/meaning-making that is (1) language-mediated, (2) law-governed in accordance with the reciprocal

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, Seminar 23, 6 June 1962, 267, 269.

⁴⁵⁶ Nasio, 113.

functions of metaphor and metonymy, and (3) defined in terms of a counterpoise of possibility and impossibility (where unconscious metonymy metaphorically becoming as conscious metonymy defines the order of the possible and the metaphoric function of pure difference defines the real-as-impossible). By way of addressing the first question, in chapter three, I employed the term *figuring* in order to elaborate the ‘agent-like’, metaphoric, precipitation of *points de capiton* in painting – where figuring was defined, variously, as the metaphoric function of *pure difference* proper to the operation of the unary trait, lettering/tracing/differencing, a real writing or writing in the real, the insistence of the signifier without the signified, and the return of the repressed. In consequence, I suggested that, always already, any meanings determined or *figured* via the function of repression/overdetermination are sustained only insofar as they are fading before the return of the repressed – namely, an infinite field of pure differences in which there insists an infinity of letterings or tracings, identities-in-difference or trace structures. By way of addressing the second question, in the present chapter, I have employed the term *desire* in order to elaborate the ‘automatist’, metonymic, perpetuation of *points de capiton* in painting. Here, desire has been defined in terms of a metonymic function of *repetition* such that meaning *is as* reiterated and *is as* fading – which is to say, sustained only in its ambiguity in the form of an endless movement among signifying alternatives or imaginary surrogates for the ineffable *objet petit a*.

In chapter two, I proposed the term *structuring of structure* to define the reciprocity of metaphor and metonymy in accordance with which expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making admit consideration in terms of (1) a synchronic metonymy that is unconscious metaphorically becoming as a diachronic metonymy in consciousness and (2) the metaphoric precipitation and metonymic perpetuation of *points de capiton*. In the present chapter, I have suggested that the structuring of structure admits the equivalent formulation *figuring of desire*. This term provides a convenient framework for the discussion in the third part of the thesis where, in light of the preceding investigations of the nature of subjectivity and the nature of painting, I seek to enliven new potentials for considerations of the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere. In consequence, my focus shifts from *painting* and *painted matter* to related *writing* and *testimony*. In chapter

five, this discussion falls into three main areas – the discursive implications of figuring and desire first being elaborated separately, and then in combination. Thus, in section 5.1, I present an elaboration of the figuring of the *written matter* in that part of McCahon discourse addressing *Victory over Death 2* and *I one*. In section 5.2, I engage with Hotere’s *Malady* series in order to demonstrate how Hotere discourse and the discourse of art history admit consideration as *discourses of desire* or *desiring discourses*. Finally, in section 5.3, I initiate an investigation of the figuring of desire (i.e., the metaphoric precipitation and metonymic perpetuation of *points de capiton* in discourses of desire) in the context of McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse. In so doing, I define the parameters of the discussion in the final thesis chapter. Namely, that the ‘desiring discourses’ surrounding McCahon and Hotere may be fruitfully conceived in terms of the *apparent* prominence and persistence of two *points de capiton*, the inherent complexities of which I propose to discuss under the headings ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’.

Part 3 Discourse

Chapter 5 Figuring desire

5.1 Figuring discourse: AM, I, one

5.1.1 Zepke, Brown, and *Victory over Death 2*

In order to elaborate the figuring of the *written matter* in that part of McCahon discourse relevant to *Victory over Death 2* and *I one*, my analysis takes place on two levels. The first level of analysis addresses writing that directly refers to the painted matter of *Victory over Death 2* and *I one*. The second level of analysis addresses writing that critiques the writing responding to the painted matter of these works. Specifically, I evaluate Zepke's criticism of what he regards as logocentric and ontotheological thinking in Brown's reading of *Victory over Death 2* and Curnow's reading of *I one*. At risk of stating the obvious, I should acknowledge that, in presenting these analyses, inevitably and necessarily, my discussion, itself, constitutes yet another level of figuring. That is to say, my determinations of meaning are sustained only insofar as they are fading before that which is repressed/returning. In consequence, and in common with *all* the determinations presented in the course of this study, my critical reading can make no claim to be definitive or final but rather is offered only as that which envisages its own analysis (i.e., re-reading and re-writing) by others in turn.

In relation to the written matter surrounding *Victory over Death 2*, exemplifying the aforementioned 'first level' of figuring are two contemporary reviews of the Barry Lett Galleries exhibition *Colin McCahon Recent Paintings. Victory over Death or Practical Religion* (1970), in which *Victory over Death 2* was first shown.⁴⁵⁷ The first of these is

⁴⁵⁷ In McCahon and Barry Lett Galleries, *Colin McCahon Recent Paintings. Victory over Death or Practical Religion*, exh. cat. (Auckland, 1970), np, (courtesy of Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, MS-1459/623, MS-1459/1093, accessed 27-29.08.13) nine works are listed and dated (the dates given ranging from October 1969 to February 1970). The first six works are large-scale, acrylic paintings on canvas sheets, each measuring 81" high (~2060mm) and between 99" (~2515mm) and 348" (~8840mm) in length. The last three works are small, acrylic paintings on hardboard, each measuring 24x24" (~610x610mm). The works listed are: 1. *Practical Religion* (then titled 'Victory over Death'), 2. *Are there not twelve hours of daylight* (000011, February 1970, ref. 66), 3. *A question of faith* (000015, February 1970, ref. 67), 4. *Victory over Death 2* (then titled 'The Way, Truth & Life Victory over Death (2)'), 5. *This day a man is* (001515, February 1970, ref. 68), 6. *A grain of wheat* (001022, February 1970, ref. 69),

T.J. McNamara's *New Zealand Herald* article 'Astounding "I AM" Revelation: Word Power in Visual Form' (1970). In keeping with the title of his article, McNamara's account of *Victory over Death 2* suggests that 'Out of a chaos of darkness where at first it is scarcely discernible comes a great I AM... The pronoun is a huge pillar of light at once assertive and a dazzling revelation.'⁴⁵⁸ The second example is Hamish Keith's *Auckland Star* review, 'Paintings with impact of a clenched fist' (1970). Here, Keith maintains that McCahon's exhibition 'wastes no time with polite painterly gestures. It gets on with its job of confronting us with one man's intensely realised vision of what might be meant by life and death, salvation and resurrection.' Keith goes on to suggest that, in *Victory over*

7. *James 3, Practical Religion* (001625, 13 October 1969, ref. 70), 8. *Victory over Death* (000661, 10 October 1969, ref. 71), 9. *Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but we shall go and wake him* (001626, 13-14 October 1969, ref. 72).

In the name of accuracy, I observe that this information contradicts Steven Miller, Martin Browne and Marja Bloem, 'Solo Exhibitions and Selected Group Exhibitions' in Bloem and Browne, *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum and Nelson: Craig Potton, 2002), 257. Here, the numbering of the large works on canvas is slightly different and there is no mention of the smaller works on hardboard. However, that the three smaller works were actually exhibited is strongly implied in contemporary reviews of the exhibition. Thus, in Hamish Keith, 'Paintings with impact of a clenched fist,' *Auckland Star*, 4 March 1970, 9, it is noted that *James 3* is 'One of the three smallest works in the show'. Moreover, in McNamara, 'Astounding "I AM" Revelation: Word Power in Visual Form,' *New Zealand Herald*, 3 March 1970, section 1, 3, it is suggested that 'what works on the epic scale of the "Victory Over Death" picture does not work as the little jottings on a two-foot square.' This would seem to be a reference to the *Victory over Death* dated October 1969.

⁴⁵⁸ McNamara, 'Astounding "I AM" Revelation'. It may be noted that McNamara reiterates this reading of *Victory over Death 2*'s major calligraphy in his review of *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition* (1972). Thus, in *ibid*, 'City Gallery One-Man Show By McCahon', *New Zealand Herald*, 8 March 1972, section 1, 3, McNamara observes that 'In "Victory Over Death" the black is burned through by a great fall of light that makes the monumental assertion I AM'. *Victory over Death 2*'s I AM motif is also prioritised in McNamara's summary of McCahon's life and work: *ibid*, 'McCahon fulfilled an artistic vision', *New Zealand Herald*, 3 November, 1988, section 2, 1. Here, McNamara observes that *Victory over Death 2*

...has a vast I AM as part of it... McCahon uses the letters to signify the fall of light and enlightenment in the land...

These huge columns... are at once letters and light and pillars of strength...

In *Victory over Death* they suggest the voice of God and the eternal victory of the spirit over death as exemplified in the story of Lazarus.

Death 2, ‘the massive image of “I Am,” is as much the pillars of a temple or a shaft of light, or a lightning flash, as it is a word.’⁴⁵⁹

In both reviews, priority and privilege is accorded to the figure I AM and/or to the status of the central I-form as a ‘pillar of light’. At the same time, however, it is significant that, in so delimiting *Victory over Death 2*’s major calligraphy, both McNamara and Keith are apparently impelled to tacitly acknowledge the insistence of otherness and ambiguity. Hence, in what invites interpretation as a simultaneous acknowledgement *and* disregarding of *Victory over Death 2*’s darkly rendered, leftward AM, McNamara alludes to that from whence the I AM emerges – namely, the ‘chaos of darkness where at first it is scarcely discernible’. Analogously, Keith’s determination of the ‘massive image of “I Am” ’ occurs in concert with the stating of other possibilities (‘pillars of a temple’, ‘a shaft of light’, ‘a lightning flash’). To some degree, the stating of these other possibilities merely reiterates the primacy of *Victory over Death 2*’s I AM – now the recipient of a four-fold reification. Indeed, Keith suggests that, by virtue of this slippage from symbolic to pictorial, the figure I AM is a condensation/summation of the meaning of the work:

It carries, by this image, an illumination of the smaller areas of text, ‘While you have the light, trust to the light, that you may become men of light,’ as well as the assertion of the individual spirit or, in a strictly Christian sense, the risen Christ.

Nevertheless, Keith also concedes: ‘It would be a mistake, of course, to settle for a strictly Christian interpretation of these paintings. They may well exist on that level, but they also exist on many others.’⁴⁶⁰

From the perspective of psychoanalysis (and in light of the discussion presented in chapter three), expressions of certainty that, on closer inspection, evince ambiguity are precisely illustrative of the psychological functions of negation and repression. By virtue of

⁴⁵⁹ Keith, ‘Paintings with impact of a clenched fist’.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

equivocations, qualifying asides, afterthoughts, etc., that which is, ostensibly, determined (i.e., a sign or figure, in relation to which there emerges a signified or *point de capiton*) is subject to negation/fading/ambiguity, and thus testifies to the return of that which is repressed. In the accounts of *Victory over Death 2* by McNamara and Keith, this negation/fading/ambiguity attaches to the meaning of the figure I AM. As stated previously, ‘that’ which is repressed/returning is *not* any kind of determinable figure or entity but rather an identity-in-difference, trace structure, or ‘signifier without a signified’. Whilst this identity-in-difference fundamentally resists representation and/or symbolisation, for the sake of convenience, its form may be suggested by constructions like AM (dark)/I AM (light), dark/light, non-being/being, void/substance, absence/presence, and so forth.⁴⁶¹

By way of proceeding to an illustration of the so-called ‘second level’ of figuring in the writing surrounding *Victory over Death 2 et al*, it may be observed that the privilege McNamara and Keith accord *Victory over Death 2*’s I AM is closely reiterated in Brown’s *Colin McCahon: Artist*. Here, Brown asserts:

A massive I AM traverses the full 213-centimetre height of the painting as pillars of light rising up to support the heavens; then, in response to Jesus’ cry of ‘Father, glory your name’, there descends, like a thunderous crack of lightning, the

⁴⁶¹ Given that, in the privileging of its major calligraphy as I AM, it is *Victory over Death 2*’s barely visible, leftward AM and/or dark background that is neglected or marginalised, it may be tempting to regard the leftward AM and/or dark background as that which is repressed. Strictly speaking, however, to succumb to this temptation is to misunderstand what is entailed in repression/overdetermination, and the tension between consciousness and the unconscious thereby implied. To be clear on this point, *consciousness* is a domain of making determinations (albeit contingent and ideal) that are sustained, *in their meaning ambiguity* (i.e., sustained only insofar as, always already, they are fading) by virtue of repressions/returns in which subsist/insist *unconscious* meanings *in potentia*. Consciousness simply *is* making determinations. In consequence, always already, any reference to ‘that’ which is neglected or marginalised is precisely a determination of consciousness. Hence, one cannot speak of the ‘repression’ of the leftward AM, without, in effect, making a determination that is, itself, sustained on the basis of a repression, and that, always already, is fading in the face of the return of the repressed. By definition, and however retrospectively or belatedly it is determined, as an object of *conscious* reflection, the figure AM cannot be of the *unconscious* order of the repressed/returning.

answering call, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' For God has said, 'I AM that who I am, I AM what I will be: I AM.'⁴⁶²

In the first place, Brown echoes McNamara and Keith in referring to the verticals of *Victory over Death 2*'s I AM as 'pillars of light' – conduits for the transforming light of divine revelation. Secondly, Brown's invocation of the aforementioned quote from Exodus 3: 14, with its quadruplicate repetition of 'I AM', mirrors, with even greater flagrancy, the multiple emphases in Keith's review. Finally, and again in common with McNamara and Keith, Brown's prioritising of *Victory over Death 2*'s I AM occurs in concert with an accompanying qualification – namely, the reproduction of McCahon's aforementioned testimony, in *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition*, to the effect that *Victory over Death 2* is '“a simple I AM at first. But not so simple really as doubts do come in here too. I believe but don't believe.”'⁴⁶³

Brown's *Colin McCahon: Artist* is subjected to a thorough-going criticism in Zepke's MA thesis, *Colin McCahon and the Writing of Difference*. As suggested in the thesis Introduction, Zepke's work merits serious consideration insofar as it is one of the few examples of McCahon scholarship that, by virtue of a sophisticated application of post-structuralist theory, seeks to expose the metaphysical prejudices of traditionalising art history (of which, aspects of Brown's writing are exemplary). Indeed, in the present context, Zepke's assessment of Brown's privileging of *Victory over Death 2*'s I AM is of especial relevance insofar as it combines appeals to Derridean post-structuralism with glancing references to Freudian and Lacanian theory – in particular, the psychoanalytic tropes of repression and negation. Zepke's argument highlights the basic inconsistency in Brown's account. Namely, that, by virtue of privileging the figure I AM, *Victory over Death 2* is presented as a triumphant expression of self-present self-sufficiency –

⁴⁶² Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist* (Wellington: Reed, 1984), 148. I should point out that, for the most part, this study refers to the 1993 edition of Brown's book. However, in the context of a discussion addressing the criticism of Brown in Zepke's MA thesis of 1992, it is appropriate to cite the edition of Brown's text to which Zepke refers – i.e., the original edition of 1984.

⁴⁶³ McCahon and O'Reilly, *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition*, 37, quoted in Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist* (1984), 148.

ostensibly that of the Judeo-Christian divine but also, as noted in chapter one, tacitly of McCahon as artist-creator. However, this reading directly contradicts Brown's opening acknowledgement of McCahon's admission that the painting expresses 'doubts' – as if Brown has either failed to appreciate the significance of this statement or simply ignored it. Thus, Zepke suggests:

Despite the 'thunderous crack of lightning' Brown has not seen the question of the initial 'AM'... [the] emphasis on I AM drowns out the first AM, making it seemingly unreadable.

In Zepke's view, this is

...unsurprising, given Brown's (auto)biographical project, a project which as part of Western onto-theology has maintained that 'The *I am*, being experienced as an *I am present*, itself presupposes the relation with presence in general, with being as presence.'⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶⁴ Zepke, *Colin McCahon and the Writing of Difference*, 17. In support of his claim, Zepke quotes Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, 54. I should point out that, here, Zepke does not cite Derrida directly but rather via M.C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 42. In so doing, Zepke omits the word 'only' from Derrida's phrase which, fully stated, reads: 'The *I am*, being experienced only as an *I am present*, itself presupposes the relation with presence in general, with being as presence.' Ironically, Zepke's elision has the effect of introducing a degree of ambiguity into what is, ostensibly, an appeal to Derridean 'authority'. That is to say, Zepke's 'typo' weakens the force of Derrida's assertion – namely, that the logocentric prejudice that, self-evidently, the truth of being is present *as* presence rests on the presupposition that 'I am' *only* (i.e., *determinately, exclusively*) is synonymous with 'I am present'.

Similar errors infect Zepke's borrowings from the first English translation of Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976 (1974)). For example, in a key passage, where Derrida suggests that, in logocentrism and phonocentrism, there is assumed 'absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning' (12), Zepke's account reads 'of voice and the identity of meaning' (8). Where Derrida writes that 'phonocentrism merges with the historical determination of being in general as *presence*' (Derrida, *ibid*), Zepke's text omits the emphasis and jumbles the word order: 'the meaning of being as general presence' (Zepke, *ibid*). Where Derrida remarks that, among the 'subdeterminations' of phonocentrism is the 'presence of the thing to sight' (Derrida, *ibid*), Zepke's script reproduces this as 'presence of the things to sight' (Zepke, 9).

It may be argued that Zepke's errors are inconsequential – although, it is striking that, as noted above, Zepke stumbles thrice in citing from the same page of what is, after all, a primary theoretical resource. Indeed, from a psychoanalytic perspective, these stutters and stumbles are

What Zepke means by ‘Brown’s (auto)biographical project’ is an ‘art historical methodology’ where, in keeping with the metaphysical prejudices of a traditionalising art history, the individual artist-creator provides the privileged point of reference in securing the meaning of the work.⁴⁶⁵ Zepke goes on to suggest that, in accordance with the exigencies of these metaphysical prejudices, Brown ‘must repress any intimation of doubt’ in his assessments of McCahon’s work and McCahon the artist-creator – this repression constituting a ‘critical blindness’.⁴⁶⁶ Having raised the issue of repression, Zepke invokes Freud and Lacan in order to propose that *Victory over Death 2*’s leftward AM testifies to that which is ‘unconscious’ in Brown’s ‘(auto)biographical criticism’ and in the major calligraphy of McCahon’s painting. In the former case, doubt is cast on ‘the self-present simplicity of McCahon’s transcendence.’ That is to say, the degree to which, in determining the meaning of McCahon’s work, Brown considers a particular self-sufficiency or art subject called ‘McCahon’ to be the exemplary point of reference. In the latter event, ‘the dark and almost invisible “AM” could be an unconscious and repressed

not neutral but, on the contrary, invite interpretation as symptoms of precisely the kind of neglect or forgetfulness Zepke attributes to Brown. The reader is reminded, thereby, that Zepke’s determinations are, themselves, sustained only in relation to that which is repressed/returning – on which basis, always already, these determinations are fading or becoming ambiguous. Hence, Zepke’s account is not (indeed, *cannot* be) definitive: Zepke’s writing, like *any* expression of subjectivity/meaning-making (the present study included), is, irremediably, at odds with itself.

⁴⁶⁵ Zepke, *Colin McCahon and the Writing of Difference*, 4. In his elaboration of this ‘art historical methodology’, Zepke proposes that Brown tacitly appeals to ‘the conflation of the artist’s position with God’s’ wherein ‘Both maintain a transcendental relation to their signs’ (6). On this basis, Zepke contends that ‘Although McCahon could not be called “the ground of all that is”, for Brown he is certainly the ground of all his paintings.’ In consequence, Zepke identifies Brown’s ‘(auto)biographical’ mode of writing with the ‘long Western metaphysical tradition of onto-theology, a tradition which takes a transcendental (Being, God, McCahon, etc) as the univocal ground for its sign (being, the bible, paintings etc)’ (7). As Zepke relates, further, ‘In onto-theology the signifier represents the signified’ (8). That is to say, there is an assumption that signifiers admit absolute determination – at least, *in potentia*.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, 17. I would argue that Zepke’s assessment of Brown as repressing ‘any intimation of doubt’ is excessively totalising. To give Brown due credit, it should be noted that his reading of McCahon’s *Elias* series paintings and the word paintings of 1969 and 1970 does, in fact, address issues of doubt and faith, and ambiguity of meaning – even if this sensitivity to the complexity of McCahon’s work coexists with other assertions that may invite criticism. See Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist* (1984), 113-20, 148-52. This point will merit further discussion in chapter six.

question to which the “emphatic” white “I AM” would be... answer and negation’.⁴⁶⁷ That is to say, *Victory over Death 2*’s I AM negates the incipient question of being, AM I AM, and in so doing is, as Freud asserts, ‘a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed’. In consequence, Zepke concludes that *Victory over Death 2*’s I AM

...is in no way certain, answering as it does an unconscious uncertainty, an uncertain unconscious which does not know its own name, and whose emphatic repression determines that Brown’s ‘I AM’ must be as emphatic as it is.⁴⁶⁸

Whilst I would take issue with some of Zepke’s characterisations (specifically, the suggestion that *Victory over Death 2*’s leftward AM is ‘unconscious’ and ‘repressed’, and the idea that there can be ‘unconscious uncertainty’), his (psycho)analysis of Brown has merit.⁴⁶⁹ Nevertheless, it is crucial to appreciate that, necessarily and inevitably, Zepke’s account is, itself, *another* determination (or set of determinations) sustained, in its meaning ambiguity, on the basis of repressions returning. To the extent it neglects or forgets to acknowledge its own ‘fading’, Zepke’s reading of Brown is, I would suggest, also vulnerable to criticism – however much this criticism enlivens yet further levels or circuits of determinations, repressions, returns, ambiguities and fading. By way of substantiating this assertion, I observe that only in a footnote (i.e., the exemplary form of

⁴⁶⁷ Zepke, *Colin McCahon and the Writing of Difference*, 19.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Zepke’s characterisation of *Victory over Death 2*’s leftward AM as ‘an unconscious and repressed question’ ought to be taken figuratively as opposed to literally. As previously noted, always already, the meaning of the figure AM is encountered, in consciousness, *as* determined (albeit, subject to ambiguity and, thus, always already, fading). ‘That’ which is unconscious and repressed is precisely that which resists determination and, indeed, never can be made an object of consciousness – although, ‘it’ exerts effects (i.e., gives rise to symptoms) by virtue of the insistent return of the repressed. Similarly, Zepke’s allusion to an ‘unconscious uncertainty’ or an unconscious that ‘does not know its own name’ is, *prima facie*, incoherent. As noted previously, Lacan considers the unconscious to be, precisely, a realm of knowledge (*savoir*) – but it is knowledge that, as Fink points out, ‘*has no subject, nor does it need one*’. That is to say, on the level of the unconscious, there is no ‘it’ to be named. I would suggest that Zepke’s ambiguous phrasing makes more sense (at least, from a Lacanian perspective) if ‘unconscious uncertainty’ or the unconscious that ‘does not know its own name’ is considered in terms of an imaginary projection from the perspective of consciousness and ego. Confronted with the inevitable and irremediable fading of all posited determinations, it is the ego that becomes uncertain of what it ‘knows’ – including its own identity and existence.

a qualifying aside or afterthought rendering ambiguous that which was stated previously) does Zepke acknowledge that ‘This symptomatic misreading of Brown’s is not a unique one’ – alluding, in this context, to articles by Ron O’Grady and John McDonald.⁴⁷⁰ Moreover, in so doing, Zepke neglects to mention the review articles by McNamara and Keith that were contemporaneous with the first public showing of *Victory over Death 2*. Zepke’s omission of Keith’s article is especially striking given that Brown refers to it repeatedly (albeit, without supplying adequate references).⁴⁷¹ One might speculate that this lacuna – equivalent to a decentring of ‘primary sources’ – evinces Zepke’s resistance to the manner by which a traditionalising art history seeks to determine and privilege original or originating gestures. Nevertheless, scholarly rigour would appear to demand some consideration of the close correspondences between McNamara, Keith, and Brown – even if, in a post-structuralist fashion, the aim is, ultimately, to unsettle the complaisant assumption that the trio concerned are ‘saying the same thing’. Insofar as no acknowledgement of this kind is forthcoming, Zepke’s ‘single-minded’ criticism of Brown invites accusations of ‘critical blindness’ in turn. The very possibility of making this criticism of Zepke demonstrates to what degree Zepke’s determinations are, themselves, always already fading before the return of a repressed – the form of which, for the sake of argument, might be defined as ‘McNamara/Keith/Brown on *Victory over Death 2* and related works’.

5.1.2 Zepke, Curnow, and *I one*

The manner by which Zepke’s critical interventions are, themselves, figures fading by virtue of repressions returning also is evident in his evaluation of Curnow’s interpretation of *I one*, as presented in the untitled essay in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *I will need words*. As noted in chapter one (see n129), *I one* prefigures the ambiguity of *Victory over Death 2*’s central motif. Moreover, both paintings juxtapose singularity and

⁴⁷⁰ Zepke, *Colin McCahon and the Writing of Difference*, 63, n14.

⁴⁷¹ See, for example, Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist* (1984), 149, 151. Brown’s failure to footnote his references to Keith’s *Auckland Star* review article is remedied in the revised edition of *Colin McCahon: Artist* published in 1993.

duality such that the singular 'I' presides over, mediates between or, indeed, marks the identity-in-difference of a same – namely, a doubly-stated 'AM' and 'AM', or 'one' and 'one'. It is worth noting that, in contrast with the readings of McNamara, Keith, and Brown, Curnow's essay acknowledges the ambiguity of *Victory over Death 2*'s major calligraphy much more explicitly:

In VICTORY OVER DEATH 2 the ambiguity is the result of an 'am' preceding as well as following the 'I', so that the painting's major text reads: 'Am I [?] / I Am'. As if a question has been asked, then answered by the questioner him/herself. Or, as if there is some real uncertainty; it could be either. Since the first 'am' is somewhat obscured and the second in light and of a piece with the New testament text with which it is combined, it is the first reading which is to be preferred. But only preferred, the doubt is not altogether erased.⁴⁷²

Curnow's sensitivity to the nuances of McCahon's work also is evident in his reading of *I one*. As Curnow points out, *I one* is 'contemporaneous with the ELIAS series in time and style.' As is well established in McCahon scholarship, the *Elias* series paintings of 1959 allude to that moment during the Crucifixion when Christ's despairing cry '*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*' ('My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?', Mathew, 27: 46-49) is misconstrued by the onlookers as a call for the ninth century prophet 'Elias'.⁴⁷³ Hence, an exploration of doubt and faith is framed within an ambiguity of meaning. In view of the thematic preoccupations of the temporally and formally proximate *Elias* paintings, Curnow is encouraged to apply a similarly Judeo-Christian interpretation to *I one*'s play of double meanings. Thus, Curnow suggests that the light-toned, geometric shape occupying the lower portion of the work resembles both a close-up of the letter 'I' and a section of a cross, the right-hand horizontal of which is emblazoned with the word 'one'. On this basis, Curnow proposes that

⁴⁷² Curnow, untitled essay in McCahon, *I will need words*.

⁴⁷³ For in-depth discussion of the *Elias* paintings see Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist* (1993), 110-120, Zepke, *Colin McCahon and the Writing of Difference*, 51-56, and Simpson, *Colin McCahon: The Titirangi Years, 1953-59* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), 62-66.

...the question of individual identity is linked with the crucified Christ; self is a cross. The self is the impersonal 'one', and it is associated with individuation: 'one', not 'two'. The letter in the sky is the 'I' of God; Jesus and God are one and the same, that is to say they have different names, signifiers, but the same signified.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷⁴ Curnow, untitled essay in McCahon, *I will need words*. It may be noted that Curnow's employment of the jargon of structural linguistics is somewhat at odds with the definitions proposed in this study – something exemplary of the ambiguities to which, in arts scholarship, the terms 'sign', 'signifier', and 'signified' are, typically, subject. Indeed, Curnow's wording is sufficiently troubling that, in Butler and Simmons, ' "The Sound of Painting" ', corrections are proposed.

In commenting on the implications of these emendations, I should begin by affirming that I entirely agree with Butler and Simmons regarding the problematic aspects of Curnow's terminology. Nevertheless, and in harmony with the impetus of the present discussion, I also would point out that these textual modifications carry certain, unavoidable consequences. Specifically, they constitute figurings or determinations of the meaning of Curnow's text that are sustained only insofar as, always already, they are fading before that which is repressed/returning. To borrow a turn of phrase Butler and Simmons employ in their essay, one might say that, always already, *any* figuring of meaning is *mistranslation* of a 'voice before any origin, authorship or even meaning is attributed to it. It is a voice that appears before it is translated, or that is able only to be mistranslated' (339-40). Here, Butler and Simmons are responding, inventively, to McCahon's aforementioned admonition (see chapter one) made in relation to *The Lark's Song*:

The words must be read for their sound, they are signs for the lark's song.

...Please don't give yourself the pain of worrying out a translation of the words but try for the sound of the painting. (cited in Butler and Simmons, 340)

As Butler and Simmons suggest, the 'voice' defining 'the sound of... painting' wholly emanates neither from the painted words nor the implied speakers of such. Rather,

The voice appears as a kind of accent or phrasing in McCahon's painting, crossing its writing but not simply to be identified with it. It is something like the breath or rhythm with which its texts and images are inscribed, the 'grain' of McCahon's particular painterly hand. It is this voice that McCahon attempts to make us see in his work, and that would testify to the force of his convictions. (341)

Here, one might draw a useful parallel with Smythe's discussion of Blanchot's literary theory (see chapter three, n314) – specifically, the 'narrative... neutral voice' or 'mobile fragmentation' proper to the functioning of language-mediated, desiring subjectivity *per se*. That is to say, from a Lacanian perspective, the lettering/tracing/differencing, function of pure difference, or figuring proper to the operation of the unary trait – the insistence of which testifies to the inexhaustible and relentless 'becoming' that is subjective desire. Considered in this light, the 'voice', to which Butler and Simmons allude is neither simply nor immediately that which 'belongs' to the conscious one or individual art subject called 'McCahon'. Rather, it is the voice 'McCahon' speaks only insofar as he *is as* being given to speech by the Other of language – thereby testifying to the 'force of his convictions' as that which obtains only insofar as he *is as* being given to desire by the Other of desire. This, then, is the nature of the 'voice' by virtue of which 'painting sounds'

Given the subject matter of the *Elias* paintings, it is tempting to read *I one*'s ambiguities and doublings as dramatising existential doubts *and* fantasising their resolution. From this perspective, the correspondence of 'I/cross' and 'one', in the lower portion of the painting, invites interpretation as an illustration of the existential divide between the mortal and the divine – the 'self... [that] is a cross' is the fallen, doubting, mortal self whose Salvation demands the Crucifixion. This sacrifice makes possible the heavenly unity of 'I' and 'one' in the upper part of the work – a pictorial fantasy of existential and spiritual aspirations for self-completion and self-realisation in the re-unification of mortal and divine; the overcoming and elision of the impasse between matter and spirit. In support of this reading, it may be noted that *I one*'s juxtaposition of 'I/cross' and 'one' appears as a superimposition of different elements or existences – a difference quite literally *underlined* in the shadow arc that, implicitly, detaches the 'o' of 'one' from the white ground 'beneath' it. By contrast, in the upper half of the painting, whilst 'I' and 'one' are separately delineated, they are, so to speak, disposed on the *same* dark ground and thus exist 'on the same level'. In consequence, the bottom half of *I one*

(i.e., by which painting means) and, indeed, by virtue of which there might be a 'sounding of painting' (i.e., analysis of the meaning of painting).

In light of these preliminary observations, let us examine the *letter* of the modifications Butler and Simmons make to Curnow's text. Thus, where Curnow writes 'The letter in the sky is the "I" of God; Jesus and God are one and the same, that is to say, they have different names, signifiers, but the same signified', Butler and Simmons have 'Jesus and God are the same, they have different names as signifiers but the same signified', in relation to which they suggest: 'we would perhaps reverse this and say that what we have here is the same signifier – "I" – and different signifieds – "Jesus" and "God" ' (336). On the basis of the definitions proposed in chapter two, the characterisation of the meaning/form 'I' as a 'signifier' is admissible as a convenient shorthand and, indeed, reflects discursive practice in general. However, I would suggest that the 'reversal' to which Curnow's text is subjected is, potentially, problematic. Curnow's faulty terminology notwithstanding, I would suggest that, among the possible interpretations of his text, is that the figure or sign 'I' in *I one* means 'Jesus and God are one and the same'. On the face of it, Butler and Simmons are correct to assert that 'Jesus' and 'God', *considered separately*, are, indeed, different signs with 'different signifieds'. On this basis, *I one*'s 'I' is the 'I of God *and* the 'I of Jesus – that is to say, 'I' is a sign with two meanings. At the same time, however, there is an elision of the essential point that, in Curnow's text (and, *in potentia*, in a manner that is not entirely a matter of conscious intention), the 'I' form does not *simply* refer to two singular entities called 'Jesus' and 'God'. Rather, I would suggest that *I one*'s 'I' also is the sign which means 'Jesus *and* God'. The ambiguity of this sign may be said to bear witness to the return of the repressed identity-in-difference or signifier without a signified that, for the sake of argument, might be represented/symbolised as 'Jesus/God' or, indeed, '...I/one/Jesus/God/...'.

admits consideration as a conjunction of *distinct existences* – a unity divided. In the upper half of the painting, however, ‘I’ and ‘one’ offer to function as different *aspects* of a unity that does not admit divisibility on the basis of this differentiation – that is to say, as aspects of a *duality* or, indeed, an *identity-in-difference*.

Moreover, given Curnow’s reference to *I one*’s uppermost ‘I’ as a ‘letter in the sky’, the ‘I/cross’ fragment, in the lower part of the work, invites interpretation as a brightly rendered, abstracted landscape. If this reading is tenable then the dark rectangle at lower right resembles a hollow or opening. Although the visual resonance is, admittedly, somewhat tenuous, one is reminded of McCahon’s paintings of Christ’s entombment – particularly, those works depicting a sarcophagus in a cave. Examples include *Easter Morning* (000662, February-April 1950, ref. 73), where the still-sealed sarcophagus glows in anticipation of Christ’s Resurrection, and *The Marys at the Tomb* (000669, January-March 1950, ref. 74), where the now-empty sarcophagus testifies to the miracle that has occurred. Whilst Curnow does not mention these works explicitly, he does remark:

With the resurrection ‘one’ ascends, from the cross (or is it from the tomb?) to the ‘I’.⁴⁷⁵

Zepke disputes Curnow’s analysis, contending that the interpretation Curnow offers, ‘despite pointing out most of the work’s differences and multiplicities, still homogenises them in a unifying reading’.⁴⁷⁶ In Zepke’s view, this ‘homogenisation’ inheres in the manner by which Curnow’s reading remains ‘fairly close to Christian theology, conflating Jesus and God in the singular signifiers “one” and “I” with man’s ascendancy to God achieved through his identification with Christ.’⁴⁷⁷ However, as Zepke relates,

⁴⁷⁵ Curnow, untitled essay in McCahon, *I will need words*.

⁴⁷⁶ Zepke, *Colin McCahon and the Writing of Difference*, 23.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 23-24.

further, the degree to which McCahon's painting 'resists' this reading follows from Curnow's interpretation of *I one*'s lower left, right-angled form as 'I' and 'cross':

As both 'I' and cross, it links "the question of individual identity with the unified Christ"... But as Curnow himself points out, its identity as a cross is debatable, and if it were a cross it would be the Tau cross, not the cross Christ was crucified on. Curnow must ignore such differences to maintain the force (i.e., coherence) of his narrative.⁴⁷⁸

In a similar fashion, Zepke observes the evident tension between Curnow's assertion that *I one*'s upper 'I' implies that 'Jesus and God are one and the same, that is to say they have different names, signifiers, but the same signified', and his admission that the painting is a visual pun in which 'the *image* of the cross is connected with the *sign* I... in a marriage of coincidence and convenience.'⁴⁷⁹ For Zepke, Curnow's 'traditional, theological reading' 'effectively ignores the multiplying effects of the pun' in a 'repression' that underpins Curnow's association of the self with the singular individual.⁴⁸⁰

In harmony with the impetus of the present study, Zepke makes glancing references to both Saussurean linguistics and Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to substantiate the view that any 'unifying reading' of a work like *I one* is destined to miscarry. Thus, Zepke invokes Saussurean diacriticality in support of the view that 'signifiers do not operate through a positive and necessary reference to a signified, but by differentiation.'⁴⁸¹ Zepke also appeals to the Lacanian distinction between the 'subject of the enunciation' and the 'subject of the statement' (i.e., as noted in section 3.1, between the so-called 'subject of the unconscious' and the conscious ego) in order to illustrate that language-mediated expressions of subjectivity involve a doubling 'differentiation and exteriorisation' in

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid, 24.

⁴⁷⁹ Curnow, untitled essay in Colin McCahon, *I will need words*.

⁴⁸⁰ Zepke, *Colin McCahon and the Writing of Difference*, 24.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

which there obtains an ‘alienating’ ‘disjunction between a pre-existing language, and the individual who uses it.’ Thus, contrary to Curnow, Zepke concludes that ‘individuation involves “two” not “one”.’⁴⁸²

Again, whilst Zepke’s criticism of Curnow has merit, I would argue that it is also characterised by a certain irony insofar as it perpetrates the very privileging of ‘singleness’ it would seek to undermine. Thus, whilst Zepke’s appeals to structural linguistics and psychoanalysis support his contention that ‘individuation involves “two” not “one”’, there is repression of the fact that the ‘traditional theology’, to which Curnow appeals in his interpretation of *I one*, also conceives of individuation in terms of dualities (e.g., the paradox of divine incarnation in the body of Christ) or even trinities (e.g., Father, Son, Holy Ghost). Insofar as Zepke’s analysis is vulnerable to criticism on these counts, always already, its determinations are fading before the return of repressed identities-in-difference of the form ‘*I one*/self is a cross’ or ‘*I one*/divinity is duality (or trinity)’. Notwithstanding Zepke’s unswerving tenacity in seizing upon a *particular* interpretation of Curnow, I would suggest that, whether by intent or insufficiency, Curnow’s succinct, allusive analysis is as resistant to univocal interpretations as the painting to which it is addressed. Is it mere incoherence when Curnow states, in the same breath, as it were, that ‘self is a cross’ (i.e., a conjunction of *two* natures: the *one that is two* or the *identity that is difference* – a reading that finds further support in the meaning of the word ‘cross’, which signifies, precisely, the ‘one that is two’ or the ‘two in the one’) *and* ‘the impersonal “one”’? Could it be the case that the jarring force of this juxtaposition is more in the nature of a poetical device (one, moreover, that, precisely, evinces a ‘speaking of two minds’ – a tension between consciousness and the unconscious) wherein Curnow’s text emulates, rather than eliminates, the ambiguities in McCahon’s painting?

⁴⁸² Ibid, 25.

5.2 Desiring discourse: circumnavigating the *Malady* series

5.2.1 Desiring discourses: the *Malady* series and the discourse of art history

In keeping with the thematic of figuring desire, the following discussion presents an interpretation of the *Malady* series and the discourse of art history as *discourses of desire* or *desiring discourses*. This characterisation reflects the following, instrumental points. Firstly, the *Malady* series and the discourse of art history constitute *discourses* insofar as they are collections of language-mediated expressions of subjectivity corresponding, for example, to individual *Malady* series works or individual pieces of scholarship (however ambiguous or evanescent may be the criteria on which basis these works are defined). Secondly, language-mediated expressions of subjectivity evince the structure of subjective desire. Hence, in order to understand how the *Malady* series and the discourse of art history are discourses of desire, it is necessary to elaborate how they express the structure of subjective desire. As previously discussed, the structure of subjective desire manifests as (1) the automatist, metonymic dimension of the perpetuation of *points de capiton* such that these posited signifieds *are as* reiterated and *are as* fading (i.e., sustained only in their ambiguity, in the form of an endless series of signifying alternatives), and (2) an impetus to recover that which *is as* primordially lost and to resolve that which *is as* fundamentally irreducible – namely, a mythical, founding object, moment, or condition of being.

Combining these formulae, one may say that the structure of subjective desire is synonymous with the automatism/metonymy/repetition by which there is posited an endless series of signifying alternatives, determined objects, or imaginary surrogates for the primordially lost/fundamentally irreducible object cause of desire (which, in chapter four, was termed ‘little o ’, and which I will now generally refer to as *objet petit a*). That there is no possibility of recovering/resolving the ineffable object cause of desire is implicit in the Lacanian understanding that ‘desire... is caught in the rails of metonymy,

eternally extending towards the *desire for something else*'. However, given that *objet petit a* is not an actual object but rather that which expresses the *structure* of subjective desire in terms of a counterpoise of possibility and impossibility (i.e., $\$ \diamond a$, in Lacan's 'algebra'), this formula admits an alternative interpretation. Namely, that subjective desire does not incline towards the recovery, resolution, or re-presencing of an *object* but rather, as Fink suggests, towards *the condition of desiring itself*: 'desirousness.'⁴⁸³ As Fink relates, further,

Desire, strictly speaking, has no object. In its essence, desire is a constant search for something else, and there is no specifiable object that is capable of satisfying it... Desire... does not seek satisfaction, but rather its own continuation...⁴⁸⁴

Hence, whilst there is, strictly speaking, no 'satisfying' desire (in the sense of promoting a cessation of desire through the recovery/resolution of a mythical, founding object, moment, or condition of being), with some loss of rigour, one may say that, paradoxically, *desire is satisfied in the very missing of its aim* or, indeed, that *desire finds satisfaction in its very perpetuation*. Support for this interpretation may be found in *Seminar VIII*. Here, alluding to the object cause of desire as a 'being... which... already distances itself and is already eternally lost', Lacan goes on to suggest that

...this being is all the same the very one that you are trying to rejoin along the paths of your desire. Only that being is yours, and... it is, in some way or other, because of not wanting it, that you have also more or less missed it.⁴⁸⁵

Still further, Lacan also remarks that

...the first ambivalence proper to every demand is that in every demand there is also implied that the subject does not want it to be satisfied, aims in itself at the

⁴⁸³ Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 59.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid, 90. See also Evans, 37, where it is observed that 'The realisation of desire does not consist in being "fulfilled", but in the reproduction of desire as such.'

⁴⁸⁵ Lacan, *Seminar VIII*, Seminar 3, 30 November 1960, 28.

safeguarding of desire, testifies to the blind presence of the unnamed, blind desire.⁴⁸⁶

It may be observed that this conception of desire harmonises with Lacan's conception of the subjectivity defined by the 'end' of analysis – namely, that which, by virtue of structural and ethical necessity, is a mode of *being in and as traversing fantasy* such that desire is sublimated into drive. The difference is that, in traversing fantasy, desire sublimated into drive *is* named and thus no longer blind (at least, from the idealising and rationalising perspective of consciousness). That said, the attainment of this desire so named (i.e., the attainment of a nominated drive object or imaginary surrogate for *objet petit a*) is indefinitely deferred. In the topological vernacular of *Seminar IX*, the manner by which desire tends towards its own perpetuation also is implicit in the eternally incomplete toroidal path traced by the endless series of poloidal circulations around the body of the torus or the cutting of the four-dimensional cross-cap along the redoubled path of the interior eight.

Let us apply this interpretation to the *Malady* series. The suggestion is that, considered as a discourse of desire, the *Malady* series bears witness to the manner by which desire perpetuates itself in the continual missing of its aim. Here, it is important to appreciate that, notwithstanding references to the 'agent-like', metaphoric function involved in the 'structuring of structure' or the 'figuring of desire', strictly speaking, the 'missing of the aim' of desire is not a matter of (an unconscious) subjective *intentionality* but rather an expression of subjectivity understood in terms of a structurally necessary counterpoise of possibility and impossibility. From this logico-structural perspective, the desire that perpetually misses its aim is synonymous with the impossibility of actually or really recovering/resolving *objet petit a* – which is to say, the impossibility of actualising/realising *objet petit a as an object in consciousness*. For the sake of convenience, this impossibility may be understood as that which attaches to the determination, in an absolutely definitive and unambiguous fashion, of nothing other than the meaning of the sign 'the *Malady* series' – although, to be precise, in the context of the

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, Seminar 14, 15 March 1961, 173.

Malady series considered as a desiring discourse, this sign is, *in potentia*, only one of an infinity of signifying alternatives, determined objects, or imaginary surrogates that may be posited in the place of the ineffable *objet petit a*.

An equivalent understanding of the way in which the *Malady* series, considered as a discourse of desire, bears witness to the manner by which desire perpetuates itself in the continual missing of its aim follows from Lacan's assertion, in 'The Direction of the Treatment', that 'desire is the metonymy of the want-to-be'. In the first place, and in accordance with the status of consciousness as a domain of idealisation and rationalisation of meaning, one might say that the very *articulation* of the name or identity 'the *Malady* series' asserts, as a *fait accompli*, the *fulfilment* of the desire for such *to be* (which is to say, to be a forming-meaning and a meaning-forming entirely and self-sufficiently). Secondly, however, desire, conceived as the *metonymy* of the 'want-to-be', testifies to the ultimate insufficiency of these articulations – i.e., the manner by which, always already, determinations of meaning *are as* reiterated and *are as* fading. In relation to the discussion presented in chapter four, this is simply to reiterate that the 'metonymy of the want-to-be' is synonymous with the understanding of desire as the 'lack of being whereby the being exists' – thereby defining a subjectivity that is not so much insufficient as incomplete, in process, becoming, *in potentia*.⁴⁸⁷ As stated above, the manner by which the signified 'the *Malady* series' is sustained only in its ambiguity (in the form of a repetitive series of signifying alternatives or imaginary surrogates for *objet petit a*) testifies to the impossibility of attaining the object(ive) of desire. Paradoxically, however, it is *in* the very *reiteration* of this 'failure' that the desire in question is 'fulfilled' – even if, ultimately, this fulfilment amounts to nothing more than what, in Žižek's parlance, may be termed the 'radical contingency' of determining the sign 'the *Malady* series' as a metonymic ensemble of less complex signs, within which, by virtue of the repression of difference, one may discern the repetition of a same – e.g., the name 'Malady'.

⁴⁸⁷ As previously discussed in chapter four, this subjectivity also may be conceived in terms of the 'superimposition of two lacks' defining 'the desire of the subject and the desire of the Other' – and summarised in the matheme of phantasy: $\$ \diamond a$.

5.2.2 Circumnavigating the *Malady* series

In light of the preceding discussion, let us now consider the *Malady* series as it relates to the desiring discourse of art history. Here, the suggestion is that, in common with the *Malady* series, conceived as a discourse of desire, the discourse of art history is, similarly, defined by the symptomatic positing of a series of imaginary surrogates for *objet petit a* (indeed, if this is not stating the obvious, this condition is intrinsic to *any* discourse, *any* expression of subjectivity/meaning-making – the present study included). To the extent that it labours under metaphysical prejudices, art history exhibits a variety of these symptomatic gestures – two of which I propose to illustrate with reference to the *Malady* series. In light of the previous discussion, both gestures admit consideration as symptoms of the desire to realise or actualise *objet petit a* as an object in consciousness through the absolute determination of the meaning of the sign ‘the *Malady* series’. In the first case, the desire in question is evident in the effort to determine elements that may be termed common, exemplary, essential, original, etc. In the second case, the desire is expressed in the effort to achieve a full summation or accounting – an activity exemplified by that most prestigious class of art historical documents: the *catalogue raisonné*. In this regard, it may be apparent that each of these imperatives presupposes the other. Always already, to seek common elements in a *body of work* is to presuppose the existence of a corpus. Always already, to seek a final accounting of a body of work is to presuppose the existence of elements common to *all* works, on which basis the corpus *can be fully counted*. Logically speaking, then, ‘the common element’ and ‘the corpus’ are inextricably co-dependent. If one cannot sustain the idea of a common element (or a collection of common elements) then, by inference, there is also precluded the possibility of fully determining the corpus.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁸ In the context of McCahon discourse, this point is illustrated in Curnow, ‘Necessary Protection’ in McCahon and Curnow, *McCahon’s ‘Necessary Protection,’* exh. cat. (New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1977), 8-9, where Curnow conceives of McCahon’s *oeuvre* in terms of series of works that are either ‘open’ or ‘closed’ but, at the same time, also allows that the distinction is subject to ambiguity. For example (and in a fashion that resonates precisely with Hotere’s ambiguous system of denominating *Malady* series works), Curnow refers to McCahon’s *Comets* as ‘an open series containing optional closed series, like the triptych... (F1-2-3), and... F4-5-6-7, which has the added numbering: 1-4.’ Indeed, the *Colin McCahon Online*

That the *Malady* series is, indeed, fundamentally resistant to an ultimate accounting or, figuratively speaking, a *circumnavigation*, is already implicit in the discussion presented in section 4.2. There, I considered the signs (1) ‘the *Malady* series’ *typical* application of art media to certain supports’, (2) ‘the *Malady* series’ *characteristic* palette of blacks and charcoal greys’, and (3) ‘the *Malady* series’ *common* juxtaposing of stencilled text and simple geometric forms’. I observed that all of these posited, common, signifying elements are subject to irremediable ambiguity – on which basis it may be concluded that there is *no* isolable or definable feature exemplary of *all Malady* series works *other than* the ‘radically contingent’ repetition of the name ‘Malady’. In light of the argument presented above, this implies that an absolutely definitive and final *catalogue raisonné* of the *Malady* series is impossible.⁴⁸⁹ By way of illustrating this proposition, let us consider the ambiguities that arise even when one seeks to delimit only the *Malady* acrylic paintings on canvas completed in 1970 (that is to say, even when one subjects the field of study to an entirely contingent restriction, conveniently instituted in order to make the process of accounting more tractable).⁴⁹⁰

Catalogue lists *Comet* (F1, F2, F3) (000244, 1974, ref. 75), (the respective components of which also bear the numerical inscriptions verso ‘3’, ‘2’, and ‘1’), *Comet* (F4, F5, F6, F7) (001526, 1974, ref. 76) (the respective components of which, as Curnow observes, bear the facing inscriptions ‘1’, ‘2’, ‘3’, and ‘4’), *Comet* (F8, F9, F10) (000672, 1974, ref. 77), *Comet* (F11) (001562, 1974, ref. 78), and *Comet* (F12) (000309, 1974, ref. 79).

⁴⁸⁹ The suggestion that an artist’s *oeuvre* or part thereof may resist absolute determination does *not* imply that these endeavours are, necessarily, futile or useless. In the face of a dearth of data or access to primary source materials, analysis and criticism can find no traction. For this reason, and notwithstanding certain reservations that may obtain in relation to matters of procedure or interpretation, I fully acknowledge the value and importance of the efforts of art historians in researching primary sources and, thereby, imposing a degree of definition on the field of study.

⁴⁹⁰ See section 8.9 for a presentation of data on *Malady* series acrylic paintings on canvas produced in 1970. As I point out in the thesis Introduction, the focus of this project is criticism of the discourse as opposed to primary research *per se*. Hence, for the most part, the information presented in section 8.9 (gleaned from books, exhibition catalogues, websites affiliated with art dealers, etc.) reproduces what is readily available in Hotere discourse in late 2013. In the context of the present discussion, *that* this material is fragmentary, ambiguous, and subject to error is precisely what is of interest. To the extent that the information presented in various contexts *is* reliable (not a given), it is possible to confirm the appearance of fourteen of nineteen *Malady* series paintings. As I acknowledge in section 8.9, question marks remain concerning the appearance of *IV*, *VII*, *IX*, *X*, *XVI*, and *XVIII*.

In this regard, on the basis of contemporaneous newspaper reviews, journal articles, and exhibition catalogues, it would seem that *nineteen Malady* series paintings were exhibited in 1970, in two separate exhibitions. The first show, *Black Paintings 1970 – Malady Series*, was held at Dawsons Ltd Exhibition Gallery, Dunedin, in July 1970 and, apparently, included fifteen paintings, numbered *I – XV*, as well as an unspecified number of preparatory drawings. A search of archival material on Hotere, located in the Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago and the E.H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, failed to unearth any surviving exhibition catalogue. However, independent corroboration of the Dawsons Gallery show may be found in Tom Esplin’s brief *Otago Daily Times* review article, ‘Black Art Of Ralph Hotere Is Stark Social Comment’ (1970), and Gordon Collier’s more in-depth summary in the ‘Reviews’ section of the December 1970 edition of *Landfall*. Thus, Esplin remarks that ‘ “Black Painting I” to “Black Painting XV” are all 70in high in acrylic and completed in this year’ and that ‘Hotere’s 15 black paintings have turned a little gallery under Dawsons into a little chapel’.⁴⁹¹ Similarly, Collier refers to

Hotere’s most recent exhibition of paintings and drawings – ‘Black Paintings I-XV from “Malady” a poem by Bill Manhire’

Moreover, Collier provides a detailed description of the works exhibited, noting that ‘There are fifteen paintings... constituting a group but not a series’⁴⁹² – a precise and cautious assessment that testifies to his sensitivity to the differences obtaining between individual *Malady* paintings. Collier goes on to observe that the paintings

...all have a black (darker-than-charcoal-grey) ground; they are identically framed in black; they are all the same height (about seven feet); there is a slight variation in width... Ten of the paintings show vertical listings of either ‘melody’ or ‘malady’ alone. A couple incorporate ‘my lady’. A small number use a cross- and/or circle-

⁴⁹¹ Tom Esplin, ‘Black Art Of Ralph Hotere Is Stark Social Comment’, *Otago Daily Times*, 20 July 1970, 9.

⁴⁹² Gordon Collier, ‘Reviews’, *Landfall* 96, v24, n4, December 1970, 418.

motif as a central structural feature. Five combine ‘melody’ and ‘malady’ on the one surface, vertically, diagonally, or as a border or internal frame’,⁴⁹³

The second exhibition of *Malady* series paintings, *Ralph Hotere, Malady*, was held at the Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland, in October 1970. According to the accompanying pamphlet, this consisted of fourteen paintings: *II, III, IV, VI, VII, X* (each measuring 70x28 inches) and *XI, XIIB, XIII, XIV, XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII* (each measuring 70x36 inches).⁴⁹⁴ If this information is accurate, there were, apparently, four paintings not previously shown: *XIIB, XVI, XVII, and XVIII*. A degree of independent corroboration is provided by McNamara’s *New Zealand Herald* review article ‘Ralph Hotere Exhibition Is Triumph’ (1970). Whilst McNamara does not provide a comprehensive summary of the Barry Lett show, he does mention several works by name (although, as I indicate below, some of McNamara’s identifications are contrary to other documentation in Hotere discourse). Thus, McNamara remarks on the ‘delicate shading of words into black from colours like the deep blue on the edge of “Painting VI” ’ and opines, further, that

The most striking is “Painting II” where My Lady is enshrined at the top of a pillar made up of Melody. On the pillar beneath My Lady a circle is delicately balanced and this is shaded with dimly perceived letterings of Malady with some slight variants.

This and the arched form in “Painting XII,” the circle that hovers over a horizon in “Painting XI” and the powerfully rising reds and violet in “Painting VII,” provoke the deepest thought.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹³ Ibid, 418-19.

⁴⁹⁴ Hotere, *Ralph Hotere, Malady*, exh. cat. (Barry Lett Galleries: Auckland, nd), np, courtesy of Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, MS-1459/048, accessed 27-29.08.13.

⁴⁹⁵ McNamara, ‘Ralph Hotere Exhibition Is Triumph’, *New Zealand Herald*, 15 October 1970, section 1, 7. It should be noted that McNamara’s descriptions are not entirely consistent with the information presented in section 8.9. What McNamara terms ‘ “Painting II” ’ contradicts information presented in John Furphy, *Australian Art Sales Digest* (although, this is not to imply that Furphy’s data is entirely reliable) and, indeed, at the time of writing, does not appear to match any readily available reproduction of a *Malady* series painting. Similarly, McNamara’s reference to the ‘arched form’ in ‘ “Painting XII” ’ seems to be a reference to *Black Painting XIIB from “Malady”* (especially given that *XIIB*, and not *XII*, is specified in the Barry Lett Galleries exhibition catalogue). I have not been able to independently verify the appearance of the work McNamara identifies as ‘ “Painting VII” ’.

Further documentation of the disposition of *Malady* series paintings completed in 1970 is presented in the catalogue accompanying the Dunedin Public Art Gallery sponsored touring exhibition, *Ralph Hotere, A survey 1963-73* (1974). Under the heading ‘BLACK PAINTINGS 1970 – MALADY SERIES’ one finds *I*, *V*, *IX*, *X*, *XI*, *XII*, and *XIV* listed as ‘First exhibited Dawsons Exhibition Gallery, Dunedin, 1970’. Number *XVII* and an un-numbered work bearing the generic title ‘**BLACK PAINTING from Malady a poem by Bill Manhire**’ are listed as ‘First exhibited Barry Lett Galleries, 1970’ (i.e., if the Barry Lett Galleries catalogue is accurate then this latter painting would appear to be *XIIB*, *XVI*, or *XVIII*). In agreement with the height and width data presented in Barry Lett Galleries documentation, the Dunedin Public Art Gallery catalogue specifies two, broad categories of widths (71.0 to 71.6cm and 91.2 to 91.4cm) with heights all falling within the range 177.2 to 178.1cm. This would appear to confirm that (most of the) *Malady* series works numbered *I* to *X* were ~28in (~711mm) in width, subsequent paintings being ~36in (~914mm) in width.

Nevertheless, even assuming that the surviving documentation is substantially correct, it is clear that the nineteen *Malady* series paintings exhibited in 1970 do not account for *all* the *Malady* series paintings produced. Relevant, in this regard, are those paintings that might be regarded as *Malady* series ‘outliers’ insofar as they exhibit non-standard dimensions and/or lack serial identifiers in the form of letters and/or numbers. *Painting from “Malady”* constitutes one example given that, as noted previously, it is of a standard width (912mm) but truncated in height (1116mm). Moreover, in the three extant books on Hotere’s painting, the legends accompanying reproductions of *Painting from “Malady”* give no indication that the title of the work is qualified by additional identifying numbers or letters.⁴⁹⁶ Similar ambiguities concern the status of other *Malady* series paintings such as the Dowse Art Museum’s *Black Painting from “Malady”*, and Te

⁴⁹⁶ In making this point, I am referring to the labelling accompanying reproductions of *Painting from “Malady”* in, respectively, Hotere, Baker, and O’Sullivan, *Ralph Hotere*, 60, David Eggleton, ‘From Absence to Presence’ in *Ralph Hotere: Black Light*, 60, and O’Brien, *Hotere, Out The Black Window*, 34.

Manawa's *Black Painting III from "Malady"* and *Black Painting IIIa from "Malady"*. As previously noted, all three paintings depart from the 'standard dimensions' of *Malady* series works as reported in the Barry Lett Galleries catalogue. In addition, it appears that the painting in the Dowse lacks any indication of numbering.⁴⁹⁷

These ambiguities are exacerbated by the inconsistencies attending Hotere's 'system' of embellishing the titles of *Malady* series paintings with letters and numbers. In the first place, as noted above, these designations are not applied to *all Malady* series works. In consequence, they do not constitute an all-encompassing framework, within which may be securely defined either the total number of *Malady* series paintings produced or their precise order of creation. Secondly, a closer examination of those pictures that *are* so labelled suggests that Hotere's alphanumeric qualifiers obey an intractable logic – that is to say, their application tends towards 'radical contingency'. By way of illustrating this latter point, consider for example, the designations of, respectively, *Black Painting III from "Malady"* and *Black Painting IIIa from "Malady"*, and *Black Painting XII from "Malady"* and *Black Painting XIIB from "Malady"*. One might expect that paintings *IIIa* and *XIIB* are so denominated in order to signal their close affinity with or, indeed, status as second versions or re-workings of, respectively, paintings *III* and *XII*. On this basis, the employment of the 'a' and 'B' suffixes would seem to testify to the insufficiency of a system of naming based on Roman numerals alone and thus of the necessity, perhaps, to more finely discriminate subgroups within the *Malady* series as a whole.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁷ Email correspondence between the author and Georgia Morgan (Registrar, Dowse Art Museum), 29 November 2013, confirms that, whilst the 'title, signature and date are present on the verso', 'There is no numbering on the painting'.

⁴⁹⁸ Indeed, in view of the fact that *Black Painting XIIIa from "Malady"* employs a lowercase suffix, the appearance of the uppercase suffix 'B' in *Black Painting XIIB from "Malady"* introduces a further level of denominative complexity and, hence, further uncertainties with regard to the limits of the *Malady* series. It must be allowed that, beyond a certain point, the proliferation of 'possible' *Malady* series works cannot be reasonably sustained. Nevertheless, if Hotere's system of designing *Malady* series works obeyed a consistent, episodic logic then, as 'precursors' to *Black Painting XIIB from "Malady"*, one might be justified in positing the existence of a *Black Painting XIIa from "Malady"*, a *Black Painting XIIA from "Malady"*, and a *Black Painting XIIb from "Malady"*.

However, this conjecture falters when one considers the appearance of the paintings in question. Sufficient differences obtain between paintings *III* (MALADYs arranged in a *Tau*-cross and in a surrounding, internal frame) and *IIIa* (MELODYs arrayed radially within seven concentric circles, with horizontal bands of MALADY above and below), and paintings *XII* (MALADYs arranged in a cruciform and in an accompanying, internal frame) and *XIIB* (MALADYs arrayed along the periphery of an arch) as to preclude any simple assumption that *IIIa* is a re-working or re-thinking of *III*, or that *XIIB* is a re-working or re-thinking of *XII*. This is not to suggest that there is *no* possibility of fabricating rationales, on which basis the titles of these paintings bear witness to relationships of form and meaning between – if not, episodic progressions from – one work to another. For example, it may be observed that the geometric forms employed in the two pairs of works under consideration (*III*'s *Tau*-cross, *IIIa*'s annulus; *XII*'s cruciform, *XIIB*'s arch-form) echo symbols often encountered in Christianity/Catholicism.⁴⁹⁹ From this perspective, it may be tempting to speculate that the two pairs of paintings evince 'progressions' from *Tau*-cross to annulus and from cruciform to arch reflecting, perhaps, the 'advancement' of Christ's story from Crucifixion to Resurrection. In keeping with this reading, one might interpret the remorselessly still and implacably orthogonal geometries of the darkly-toned *Tau*-cross and cruciform to signify the mortal body of Christ fated to be sacrificed. By contrast, the glowing annulus and arch-forms invite interpretation as symbolising the window of the Church of Christ, through which is admitted the divine revelation of Christ's transubstantiation and apotheosis. It also may be suggested that the 'sequential' figuring of *Tau*-cross/annulus, cruciform/arch signifies the hoped-for passage of humanity from a state of being Fallen to a state of being Saved. From this perspective, the *Tau*-cross/cruciform functions as an existential barrier or a sign of prohibition: the expression of divine Law, whilst the annulus/arch-form functions as a portal or a sign of permission: the expression of divine Grace.

⁴⁹⁹ As Eggleton observes, in 'Tone Poems' *Art New Zealand*, n84, Spring 1997, 83, 'At the heart of Hotere are the cross and the circle: both, the most primitive, the most primal, and the purest of human marks.' In other words, it may be suggested that these symbols transcend any particular historical or cultural context – a happenstance that would appear to preclude their precise interpretation and thus render fundamentally ambiguous any posited relation or progression between paintings *III* and *IIIa*, *XII* and *XIIB*.

Notwithstanding the attractions of applying these interpretations to justify the designations of the paintings in question, the fact remains that their underlying logic is neither simply nor immediately extensible to the *Malady* series as a whole. Indeed, the necessity to invoke piecemeal rationalisations in order to make sense of Hotere's system of naming certain *Malady* series paintings, precisely, illustrates the ambiguity attending the sign 'the *Malady* series'. To this extent, one confronts the likelihood that Hotere's system of bestowing titles on *Malady* series paintings obeys no supervening, unitary logic and thus, in consequence, the attempt to absolutely delimit the signified 'the *Malady* series' is destined to fade before the 'radical contingency' of repeatedly naming works 'Malady'. Insofar as the *Malady* series neither evinces a common ground nor submits to a final accounting, and to the extent that the discourse of art history concerns itself with the analysis and determination of this 'impossible object' called 'the *Malady* series', one finds an exemplary illustration of the status of the *Malady* series and the discourse of art history as desiring discourses – i.e., as symptoms of the desire that perpetuates itself through endlessly missing its aim.

5.3 Figuring desire: McCahon's doubt, Hotere's reticence

5.3.1 Preliminary considerations of the *points de capiton* 'McCahon's doubt' and 'Hotere's reticence'

As noted at the outset of this chapter, thus far, the thesis has appealed to Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to present a model of subjectivity understood in terms of the 'structuring of structure', the 'reciprocity of metaphor and metonymy' or, indeed, the 'figuring of desire'. From this perspective, expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making (e.g., painters, paintings and the writing and testimony surrounding painters and paintings) may be said to bear witness to the metaphoric precipitation and metonymic perpetuation of *points de capiton* in *discourses of desire*. In this final section of the present chapter, I establish the basis for discussion in chapter six, where I propose to investigate the 'desiring discourses' surrounding McCahon and Hotere in relation to the *apparent* prominence and persistence of two *points de capiton*, the inherent complexities and contradictions of which I will subsume under the headings 'McCahon's doubt' and 'Hotere's reticence'. Here, however, I would point out that, in keeping with the critical perspective this study has thus far embraced, these analyses resist the metaphysical prejudices of the 'traditionalising' mode of art history. In order to clarify what this implies for the discussion in chapter six, the following, preliminary matters demand consideration.

Firstly, as a matter of expediency, the material presented in chapter six elaborates the figure of McCahon's doubt in McCahon discourse and the figure of Hotere's reticence in Hotere discourse by way of a range of texts arranged, for the most part, chronologically, by author name. However, this is *not* to suggest that the series of proffered examples constitute (1) *all-encompassing* surveys within which (2) *developments* of the *points de capiton* 'McCahon's doubt' and 'Hotere's reticence' are securely framed by first and final words. With regard to the former point, I would concede that, whilst my survey engages with a diverse range of texts (newspaper reviews to essays in scholarly journals),

by virtue of limitations of time and space, I address only a *partial* selection of examples sufficient to illustrate the relevant features of the *points de capiton* in question. However, in light of the theory of subjectivity/meaning-making thus far elaborated, it should be clear that any *full* accounting of these figures of discourse (i.e., what would be, in effect, the absolute determination of a signified that does not fade; the absolute realisation of *objet petit a* as an object in consciousness) is, fundamentally, precluded.

With regard to the latter point, the idea that the various examples given of the *points de capiton* ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’ define a ‘developmental’ sequence of causes and effects within which earlier authors influence later authors or, alternatively, later authors appropriate earlier authors (‘authorship’, in this regard, tending to be understood in terms of the entirety and sufficiency of ‘ones that are conscious’) is, precisely, of the order of the imaginary. In keeping with the anti-traditionalising tenor of the present study, the challenge is, rather, to entertain a more nuanced conception of ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’ in terms of the ‘radical contingency’ by which the signs ‘McCahon discourse’ and ‘Hotere discourse’, respectively, are determined as metonymic ensembles of less complex signs, within which, by virtue of the repression of difference, one may discern the repetition of the *same* (i.e., the names ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’). This is precisely to say that these *points de capiton* are as reiterated and are as fading – i.e., sustained or perpetuated only in their ambiguity in the form of an endless series of signifying alternatives or imaginary surrogates for the ineffable *objet petit a*. To the extent that the perpetuation of the *points de capiton* ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’ ultimately rests on *nothing* other than the radically contingent repetition of the names ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’ (or, simply, ‘McCahon’ and ‘Hotere’), respectively, one finds an exemplary illustration of the manner by which desire finds fulfilment through endlessly missing its aim.

Secondly, and in light of the aforementioned radical contingency attending the determination of the signs ‘McCahon discourse’ and ‘Hotere discourse’, the reference to the *apparent* prominence and persistence of the *points de capiton* ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and

‘Hotere’s reticence’ is intended to obviate any suggestion that McCahon discourse ‘really’ is defined by the *point de capiton* ‘McCahon’s doubt’ or that Hotere discourse ‘really’ is defined by the *point de capiton* ‘Hotere’s reticence’ – where, in this context, ‘really’ implies ‘actually’, ‘essentially’, ‘originally’, ‘centrally’. Again, it is crucial to appreciate that *points de capiton* are posited *in consciousness* and thus, necessarily and inevitably, are products of idealisation, rationalisation, normalisation, and naturalisation. In consequence, and like *any* posited signified, figure of discourse, or perspective on the field of meaning, the *point de capiton* claims certain privileges (albeit, momentarily – it is also important to bear in mind that, always already, the *point de capiton* is posited only insofar as it is *fading*) – one of which is the intimation that it is an eternal verity. In other words, the ‘prominence’ and ‘persistence’ of the figures ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’ is, in Lacanian terms, no less *imaginary* than their seeming ‘development’ from origin to apotheosis. This is an inevitable consequence of the model of subjectivity/meaning-making thus far elaborated – namely, that the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere is the expression of an unconscious, synchronic metonymy of signifiers-as-potentials metaphorically *becoming* in consciousness as a diachronic metonymy of signifiers-as-meaning/forms. This implies that, in principle and in possibility, the *points de caption* ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’ are only two of an infinity of such that may be posited in consciousness. It is precisely a reflection of the rationalising, naturalising function of consciousness that, once posited, *points de capiton* seem to possess priority and ubiquity – although, ‘in actuality’, they possess no inherent privilege or pre-eminence.⁵⁰⁰

⁵⁰⁰ For example, one might analyse McCahon discourse in view of the *point de capiton* ‘McCahon’s provincialism’. Exemplifying the contradictions to which this figure bears witness is the tension between McCahon’s ‘peripheral’ ‘Nationalist’ outlook and McCahon’s ‘internationalism’, which looks towards artworld ‘centres’ in Europe and the United States. The elucidation of this seeming paradox is, in fact, prominent in writing by Pound – e.g., Pound, ‘McCahon, Mondrian, Masking Tape’, and the major monograph, *ibid*, *The Invention of New Zealand: Art & National Identity, 1930-1970* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009). Analogously, one might engage with McCahon discourse from the perspective of the *point de capiton* ‘McCahon’s modernism’. Among the complexities associated with this figure is the contradictory tension defined by McCahon’s adherence to modernist formal abstraction *and* his ‘anti-modernist’ investment in painting that emphasises narrative elements (e.g., the written paintings) and figuration (e.g., paintings responding to the New Zealand landscape). Examples of writing that engages with this apparent antinomy include Curnow, ‘Thinking about Colin

This is not to imply, necessarily, that analysis of the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere (not to mention criticism and scholarship *per se*) is a vain endeavour. On the contrary, I would reaffirm the point made in the thesis Introduction regarding the conception of the subjectivity defined by the ‘end’ of analysis – namely, that which, by virtue of structural and ethical necessity, is a mode of *being in and as traversing fantasy* (or, analogously, *being in and as deconstruction*). Here, the ‘end’ of analysis – which is to say the ‘final’ determination of truth and meaning – is not to be conceived in terms of an ultimate destination but rather in terms of a process of becoming: a way and a journey. From this perspective, I would suggest that the degree to which undertakings of this sort are subject to relativism and contingency is not irremediably fatal to the making of truth and meaning but, rather, defines the spaces, intervals, and horizons within which this activity can be efficacious. Adopting this standpoint challenges one to recognise that, practically speaking, in consciousness, and in accordance with the function of representation/symbolisation, all one ever has are *interpretations* (i.e., realisations or actualisations of potentials for truth and meaning) of a ‘reality’ that, ‘in itself’, never can be ‘known’ or ‘experienced’ as anything other than a set of serially posited hypotheses, and certain discontinuities and disturbances associated with the making of these hypotheses. Hence, that these interpretations are relative and/or contingent (i.e., intrinsically ambiguous, if not, at times, self-contradictory) does not constitute a complete annihilation of truth and meaning but, rather, attests to the impossibility of there being any absolute standard, original essence, or final resolution of truth and meaning.

McCahon and Barnett Newman’, *Art New Zealand*, n8, November 1977 – January 1978, 48-52, and Green, ‘McCahon and the Modern’ in *Colin McCahon, Gates and Journeys*, 27-40.

In a similar fashion, one might analyse Hotere discourse in view of the *point de capiton* ‘Hotere’s black’. Among the contradictions to which this figure testifies is the tension Hotere’s work defines between ‘black’ and ‘light’. This seeming antinomy defines the frame of the catalogue *Ralph Hotere: Black Light* and also is a prominent theme in Baker, *A World of Black and Light, Ralph Hotere 1968-1977* (PhD Thesis: University of Auckland, 2009). Still further, one might engage with Hotere discourse from the perspective of the *point de capiton* ‘Hotere’s Māoriness’. Exemplifying the apparent contradictions associated with this figure of discourse is the tension obtaining between ‘Hotere’s Māoriness’ and ‘Hotere’s modernism’. I have alluded to this writing in the thesis Introduction (see n48).

What this implies for the arguments presented in this third part of the thesis is that interpretations of McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse in terms of, respectively, the ‘prominent’ and ‘persistent’ figures ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’ *can* be meaningful and effective – if not *absolutely* so. There is value, I would argue, in exploring the implications of these perspectives on McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse – even if the perspectives in question fundamentally resist being resolved into a clear, stable, final focus. Notwithstanding the status of these readings as ‘imaginings of the imaginary’ (all that any critical analysis ever can be), and notwithstanding the irremediable ambiguities that must attend any such endeavour, the position of this project is that the elucidation of ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’ *is* of efficacy in generating some new perspectives and potentials for the practice of art history and art criticism in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that, in exploring the ‘prominence’ and ‘persistence’ of ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’, inescapably, this project is implicated in the reification of these figures *as* prominent and persistent. That is to say, necessarily and inevitably, the positing of particular meanings or perspectives on the field of meaning is synonymous with the repression of other possibilities and potentials (the subsistence/insistence of such ensuring that no interpretation ever can be final). This is the nature of any exercise in scholarship (or, indeed, meaning-making in general) – although, this study contends that, in McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse, there is, on occasion, a failure to sufficiently acknowledge this intrinsic limitation. That is to say, in Lacanian parlance, there is a tendency to indulge and invest in fantasy as opposed to traversing it.

5.3.2 Defining the *points de capiton* ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’

Let us now proceed to the discussion that will define the final part of the thesis. Here, the suggestion is that McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse, respectively, may be fruitfully conceived in terms of the seeming prominence and persistence of two, inherently contradictory, figures. In the testimony and scholarship surrounding these artists and their work, these antinomies are evident in (1) McCahon’s dual

characterisation as a prophet or *visionary and/or* as a *doubter* and (2) Hotere's dual characterisation as *eloquent and/or* as *reticent*. Indeed, in many cases, the contradiction is especially glaring insofar as McCahon is presented, simultaneously, as a visionary *and* a doubter (or even as a visionary insofar *as* he doubts – on which basis one might posit a seemingly paradoxical *vision of doubt*), and Hotere is presented, simultaneously, as eloquent *and* reticent (or even eloquent insofar *as* he is reticent – on which basis one may posit a paradoxically *eloquent reticence*). The contradictory nature of these attributions may be elaborated as follows: McCahon-as-visionary is a subject who 'sees' and 'knows'; McCahon-as-doubter is a subject who is, to some degree, 'un-seeing' and 'un-knowing'. Formerly, McCahon's vision would appear to be superlatively prescient, acute and complete; latterly, McCahon's vision is, by implication, near-sighted, obtuse and lacking. Analogously, Hotere-as-eloquent is a subject who fully speaks; Hotere-as-reticent is a subject who does not fully speak. Formerly, Hotere's eloquence signifies an apparent willingness to speak or a speaking that is articulate and richly nuanced; latterly, Hotere's reticence would appear to signify a reluctance to speak or a speaking that is laconic.

In McCahon discourse and in Hotere discourse, respectively, the (seeming) prominence and persistence of characterisations of McCahon as a visionary *and* a doubter, and of Hotere as eloquent *and* reticent may be said to constitute symptomatic formations or *points de capiton*. For the sake of convenience and simplicity (and, indeed, in accordance with what Žižek refers to as the 'radical contingency of naming'), I propose to subsume the contradictory characterisations of McCahon as a visionary and as a doubter under the rubric 'McCahon's doubt', and of Hotere as eloquent and as reticent under the sobriquet 'Hotere's reticence'. From this perspective, the apparent *repetition* of assertions that, paradoxically, McCahon 'sees' *and* 'fails to see', or that Hotere 'speaks' *and* 'fails to speak', testifies to the ambiguous status of the *points de caption* 'McCahon's doubt' and 'Hotere's reticence' as expressions of what has been termed the *figuring of desire*, thereby defining McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse as *discourses of desire*.

The manner by which the inherently ambiguous *points de capion* ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’ specify the figuring of desire in McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse, respectively, may be elaborated, further, through a consideration of what is implicit in the terms ‘doubt’ and ‘vision’, ‘reticence’ and ‘eloquence’. In the first place, then, it may be noted that, insofar as *doubt* is synonymous with hesitancy, indecision, or vacillation, it *inflects* or *qualifies* the content of subjective experience. To this extent, doubt is not that which might absolutely nullify seeing and knowing but rather that which signifies a wavering between alternatives insisting simultaneously *within the field* of that which is, *always already, seen and known*. Analogously, it is worth noting that *reticence* typically connotes taciturnity, reserve, silence – a reluctance, hesitance, or *unwillingness to speak*. However, on the basis of some dictionary definitions it is apparent that reticence also may imply ‘abstinence from the superfluous’ or the ‘avoidance of saying more than is absolutely necessary’. In other words, reticence also encompasses an *unwillingness to speak too much* and thus is not simply resistance to the *origination* of speech *per se*, but rather to its *excessive* or *unnecessary continuation*. To this extent, the function of reticence parallels the function of doubt: in the same way doubt operates within the field of that which is, *always already, seen and known*, reticence operates within the context of a speaking that is, *always already, taking place*.

The Lacanian modelling of subjectivity in terms of a structurally necessary counterpoise of possibility and impossibility offers to illuminate, further, the manner by which doubt involves a wavering between alternatives insisting simultaneously within the ‘field of vision’ and reticence a mediative ‘not speaking’ within the ‘field of speech’. In relation to the order of the possible (i.e., that which *can* be articulated in language), doubt *necessarily* colours the seeing and knowing that, in consciousness, is only a partial, ambiguous, and misleading expression of what is, *in potentia*, more ‘fully’ and ‘truly’ seen and known (one might say *envisioned*) on the level of the unconscious. Similarly, reticence designates neither the condition of silence nor the failure of the initiation of speech but rather, *by necessity*, inflects the speaking that, in consciousness, is only a partial, ambiguous, and misleading expression of what is, *in potentia*, more ‘fully’ and ‘truly’ (one might say *eloquently*) spoken on the level of the unconscious.

In relation to the order of the impossible (i.e., ‘that’ which fundamentally *resists* being articulated in language), doubt and reticence bear witness to what, in *Seminar XI*, Lacan refers to as a ‘discontinuity in which something is manifested as a vacillation.’ As previously discussed, the ‘discontinuity’ in question is synonymous with the real-as-impossible, ‘agent-like’, metaphoric function of pure difference or ‘subject of the unconscious’ synonymous with, yet inassimilable to, the function of representation/symbolisation. By virtue of the function of pure difference, the ambiguities and contradictions proper to *points de capiton* bear witness to insistently repressed/returning trace structures, ‘signifiers without signifieds’, or identities-in-difference that exceed and elude expression in language. Nevertheless, for the sake of argument, one might represent/symbolise the repressed/returning identity-in-difference proper to the *point de capiton* ‘McCahon’s doubt’ as ‘.../vision/doubt/...’. Similarly, one might represent/symbolise the repressed/returning identity-in-difference proper to the *point de capiton* ‘Hotere’s reticence’ as ‘.../eloquence/reticence/...’.

Given the impossibility of realising these repressed/returning identities-in-difference as objects in consciousness, one may say that the contradictions proper to the *points de capiton* ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’, respectively, testify to the impossibility of the ‘seeing’ that is visionary and the impossibility of the ‘speaking’ that is eloquent (or, equivalently, ‘eloquent speech’). On this basis, the attribution of visionary experience asserts a *seeing the unseeable* and the attribution of eloquent speech asserts a *speaking the unspeakable*. Still further, insofar as these identities-in-difference are *insistently* repressed/returning, the *points de capiton* ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’ *are as* reiterated and *are as* fading (i.e., sustained only in their ambiguity in the form of an endless series of signifying alternatives or imaginary surrogates for *objet petit a*). This is simply to reaffirm that the contradictions proper to the *points de capiton* ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’ (i.e., the dual attribution of McCahon-as-visionary *and* McCahon-as-doubter; of Hotere-as-eloquent *and* Hotere-as-reticent) reflect the status of ‘visionary experience’ and ‘eloquent speech’ as expressions of subjective desire. From this perspective, always already it is the case that assertions of visionary

experience invest in a *seeing the necessity to see* and assertions of eloquent speech invest in a *speaking the necessity to speak*. That is to say, on the level of consciousness and ego, appeals to visionary experience and eloquent speech testify to *imperatives to realise the impossible* and, by this very token, bear witness to the structure of subjective desire as that which finds fulfilment in endlessly missing its aim.

By way of concluding this preliminary discussion, it should be noted that an important corollary to the perpetuation of the figure of McCahon's doubt in McCahon discourse and the perpetuation of the figure of Hotere's reticence in Hotere discourse is the privileging of the individual art subjects called, respectively, 'McCahon' and 'Hotere'. Whether characterised as visionary or doubting, eloquent or reticent, McCahon-the-artist-individual and Hotere-the-artist-individual invariably function as the exemplary points of reference in writing and testimony seeking to establish the origin and the meaning of their work. Here, I would concede that perspectives of this kind often are useful and illuminating. At the same time, however, appeals to authorship and biography, pursued to the exclusion of alternative modes of analysis, demonstrate to what degree McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse labour under the metaphysical prejudices proper to what has been termed the traditionalising mode of art history or art criticism.

This said, it would appear that McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse express this privileging differently. Thus, in the discourse on McCahon and his work, there is a tendency to accord priority to McCahon's *testimony* as expressed in various writings and recorded utterances, as well as McCahon's paintings. In section 5.1, I alluded to this privileging in the context of a discussion addressing Zepke's criticism of the '(auto)biographical... art historical methodology' perpetrated in Brown's *Colin McCahon: Artist*. Indeed, in recent decades, various commentators have remarked on the special status accorded to McCahon's testimony and the deleterious effect of this privileging in the field of McCahon scholarship. Whilst it seems appropriate to acknowledge some of this writing in the following footnote, in the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand, these critical interventions are, by now, sufficiently familiar as to

preclude the necessity for any extensive rehearsal here.⁵⁰¹ Hence, by way of anticipating the discussion in chapter six, I merely observe that some writers appeal to McCahon's authority and biography in order to make sense of an *oeuvre* that may appear to be, otherwise, incomprehensibly variegated, eclectic, or inconsistent.

By contrast, allusions to 'Hotere's reticence' in Hotere discourse would seem to emphasise Hotere's *silence*. Indeed, in the discourse on Hotere and his work, it is striking that commentators do not merely observe *that* Hotere is reticent but also tend to *demand*,

⁵⁰¹ Consider, for example, Pound, 'McCahon, Skies, Stars, Writing', 153-54, where it is observed that McCahon

...was a skilled presenter in prose of his own public persona – so skilled, in fact, that criticism for many years all but abdicated before him, contenting itself with paraphrase and quotation from him.

Also relevant, in this regard, is *ibid*, 'McCahon, Mondrian, Masking Tape', 11, 18 (n3), it is noted that in 'Nationalist criticism McCahon is himself the origin and guarantor of all that is said about him, and his endorsement is required for every remark'. In a similar vein, it is asserted, in Lummis, *Modelling the New Zealand artist*, 258, 261, that 'Writing on McCahon has often been informed by McCahon's writings', and that these writings 'have consistently served to sanctify and ameliorate most art historical accounts of his work.' Here, Pound and Lummis are alluding to the body of writing that appears to take too literally the oft-cited assertion, in McCahon and O'Reilly, *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition*, 26, that

My painting is almost entirely autobiographical – it tells you where I am at any given time, where I am living and the direction I am pointing in.

For example, the above statement prefaces Curnow, 'Necessary Protection', 4, and Brown, 'The Autobiographical Factor' in *Colin McCahon: gates and journeys*, 13. However, as Lummis points out, the ambiguous dimension of McCahon's comment is evident from its apparent indebtedness to the thirteenth stanza of Hooper's poetry sequence 'Notes in the Margin', which begins: 'Poetry/isn't in my words/it's in the direction/I'm pointing' (Lummis, 267, n31, citing Hooper, 57). In relation to the model of subjectivity/meaning-making presented thus far, it is striking to what extent McCahon's appeal to autobiography is, in effect, a speaking of an other. Finally, although this does not exhaust the field of relevant examples, one also might mention Simmons, 'McCahon's Myth', 41-42. Here, Simmons identifies Curnow and Brown as 'early and enthusiastic devotees of... [the] autobiographical method', and sees, in later writing produced by William McCahon, and Agnes Wood, evidence that 'the founding autobiographical tautology still has currency'. Moreover, Simmons appeals to post-structuralist thought (specifically, Derrida's investigation of the role of the artist's signature in *Signéponge* (1984)) in order to suggest that 'paradoxically, it is a series of paintings which retrospectively create a painter, rather than a painter who creates paintings.'

justify or *apologise* for this reticence.⁵⁰² I would suggest that these demands, justifications, and apologies devolve into two basic categories where, again, in accordance with the contradictions proper to the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence', Hotere's 'silence' is or bears witness to a kind of 'speaking' (a speaking, moreover, that, in keeping with what I have termed 'eloquent speech', offers to be, *in potentia*, self-sufficiently full and entire). In the former case, and in keeping with the biographical mode of art history, there is an *identification of* or a *vanishing of distinctions between* the artist and the work. In consequence, it is suggested that Hotere *fully* speaks *in* or *through the work*. Insofar as the work is the exemplary repository or expression of this speaking, any further (verbal, written) discussion or explanation is unnecessary. In the latter event, there is an investment in the idea that Hotere's work is formally autonomous. That is to say, demands, justifications, or apologies for the artist's silence rest on the assumption that, entirely and sufficiently, *the work speaks for itself* or *the work is its own explanation*.⁵⁰³

Here, I would argue that an equivalence obtains between appeals to the formal autonomy of Hotere's paintings and appeals to the visionary quality of McCahon's paintings. In both cases, one confronts that which, ostensibly, resists analysis and explanation and, on this basis, either is *unspeakable* or *unseeable*. In the former case, this follows from the status of the formally autonomous artwork as that which offers to be, in and of itself, self-sufficiently entire; in the latter event, this follows from the status of the

⁵⁰² Relevant, in this regard, is the suggestion, in Wedde 'Figure it Out', 179, that 'the disclaiming myths of silence and virtue' surrounding Hotere and his work are the means by which 'writers on Hotere's work have apologised for their own temerity.'

⁵⁰³ Here, in the claim that, entirely and sufficiently, Hotere's work is its own explanation, one may observe a certain irony. It is apparent that, in themselves, these claims are contradictory insofar as they constitute and perpetrate the very 'explanation' that, ostensibly, they oppose (i.e., they employ the resources of written language to 'explain' Hotere's work as being 'inexplicable in words'). Moreover, these justifications (if not, in fact, apologies) for Hotere's silence *vis à vis* the work often betray prejudices and preconceptions characteristic of metaphysical thinking insofar as 'the work', or what is 'in' and 'of' the work, is taken to be simply and immediately equivalent to a material, plastic, physical entity or expression of such. In this way, appeals to the self-sufficiency and/or autonomy of the artwork are, themselves, based on the presupposition that *the artwork means nothing more than its material form* or, equivalently, *the material form of the artwork fully discloses its meaning*.

visionary artwork as that which offers to be a full and true testament of a transcendent reality or a radical alterity. To some degree, the formally autonomous artwork is that in relation to which *there remains nothing to be said*; the visionary artwork is that in relation to which *there remains nothing to be seen*. Thus, the actual creation of a formally autonomous artwork would constitute an impossible speaking the unspeakable and, similarly, the actual creation of a visionary artwork would bear witness to an impossible seeing the unseeable. Always already, then, either the effort to create or the appeal made to the status of artworks that offer to be formally autonomous/visionary testifies to an imperative to objectively realise an impossibility: i.e., subjective desire considered as speaking the necessity to speak and/or seeing the necessity to see. From the perspective of consciousness, this imperative is destined to fail and thus, by necessity, speaking the unspeakable *will be reticent*; seeing the unseeable *will be doubting*. Equivalently, one might say that *asserting* the formal autonomy of Hotere's painting is not only compensation for but, in fact, demanding of Hotere's silence. Likewise, one may say that *asserting* the visionary quality of McCahon's painting is not only compensation for but, in fact, demanding of McCahon's doubt. This is simply to reaffirm that assertions of Hotere's work as formally self-sufficient and of McCahon's work as visionary are 'imaginings of the imaginary'. That is to say, these assertions are imaginary surrogates posited in an effort to objectively realise or resolve the ineffable *objet petit a* – in this case, synonymous with the impossible speaking the unspeakable proper to the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence' and the impossible seeing the unseeable proper to the *point de capiton* 'McCahon's doubt'.

Having defined the *points de capiton* 'McCahon's doubt' and 'Hotere's reticence' in general terms, it is timely to look ahead to the more substantive discussion presented in chapter six. This final thesis chapter is organised into three main areas. In Sections 6.1 and 6.2, I survey a series of texts in McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse, respectively. As a matter of convenience, these analyses are, for the most part, ordered chronologically by author name and, notwithstanding the provisos raised in chapter five, they serve to illustrate two basic claims made in relation to the *points de capiton* 'McCahon's doubt' and 'Hotere's reticence'. In the first place, I show how the figure of

McCahon's doubt in McCahon discourse repeatedly bears witness to the characterisation of McCahon as a visionary *and* a doubter, and how the figure of Hotere's reticence in Hotere discourse repeatedly bears witness to the specification of Hotere as eloquent *and* reticent. Secondly, I draw attention to the manner by which the perpetuation of the *points de capiton* 'McCahon's doubt' and 'Hotere's reticence' tends to privilege the individual art subjects called 'McCahon' and 'Hotere', respectively – where this privileging is evident in the emphasis placed on McCahon's *testimony* and/or the visionary quality of his work, and in the emphasis accorded to Hotere's *silence* and/or the formal autonomy of his work. In section 6.3, I focus on two particular variants of the *points de capiton* 'McCahon's doubt' and 'Hotere's reticence' that reflect the manner by which (1) McCahon is not only presented, simultaneously, as a visionary *and* a doubter but rather as a visionary insofar *as* he doubts, and (2) Hotere is not only presented, simultaneously, as eloquent *and* reticent but rather as eloquent insofar *as* he is reticent. I show how these special cases arise in relation to presentations, in McCahon discourse and in Hotere discourse, respectively, of *McCahon's questioning faith* and *Hotere's effecting discursive silence* – where the figure of 'McCahon's questioning faith' testifies to an investment in an inherently contradictory *vision of doubt* or *faith in* and *as a praxis of questioning*, and the figure of 'Hotere's effecting discursive silence' bears witness to an investment in an intrinsically paradoxical *eloquent reticence* or *faith in* and *as a praxis of silent speech*.

Chapter 6 McCahon's doubt and Hotere's reticence

6.1 The figure of McCahon's doubt in McCahon discourse

6.1.1 Brasch

One of the earliest and most exemplary characterisations of McCahon as a visionary *and* a doubter is found in Charles Brasch's *Landfall* essay: 'A Note on the Work of Colin McCahon' (1950). That McCahon is a visionary artist is implied at the very outset of Brasch's essay, where it is asserted that 'There is no precedent in New Zealand for the work of Colin McCahon' and that, furthermore,

No other New Zealand painter has used either landscape or the human figure for the purpose of making general statements about the visible world, the place of man in the world, and the nature of human life.⁵⁰⁴

On a superficial level, then, Brasch's essay affirms that the visionary dimension of McCahon's work inheres in its unprecedented and original *making visible* of that which (at least, in the context of New Zealand art), previously, has been *invisible*. Namely, by virtue of re-staging stories from the Bible in recognisably New Zealand landscape settings, McCahon makes visible the existential significance of the landscape or the human body. To this extent, McCahon's vision testifies to his unique capacity to *see* that which, thus far, has been *unseen*. However, it is also evident that Brasch's construction of McCahon as a visionary artist carries deeper implications, in relation to which is enlivened the contradictory simultaneity of vision and doubt proper to the *point de capiton* 'McCahon's doubt'.

⁵⁰⁴ Charles Brasch 'A Note on the Work of Colin McCahon,' *Landfall* 16, v4, n4, December 1950, 337. Brasch is referring to McCahon's so-called 'Religious Paintings' produced between about 1946 and 1950, in which Biblical scenes are re-enacted in landscapes sometimes recognisable as that of post-war Aotearoa/New Zealand. Examples include *I Paul to you at Ngatimoti* (000666, 1946, ref. 80), *Crucifixion according to St. Mark* (001062, October 1947, ref. 81), and *The Promised Land* (000668, February – August 1948, ref. 82). For an account of this period in McCahon's *oeuvre* see, for example, Luit Bieringa, 'Colin McCahon: "Religious" Works 1946-52' in McCahon, *McCahon: 'religious' works, 1946 – 1952*, 3-11, and Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist* (1993), 35-46.

This follows from Brasch's observation that McCahon's religious paintings of the 1940s are not 'in the usual sense "religious paintings"; they are not icons, objects for worship' – that is to say, they neither literally represent religious dogma nor are they directed towards the fulfilment of any conventional, liturgical purpose. On the contrary, they are, in Brasch's opinion, 'symbolical, and the symbols chosen are the only ones which the painter has found adequate to express his vision of life.'⁵⁰⁵ In this way, the 'symbolical' dimension of McCahon's religious paintings confirms their visionary status insofar as they are visual surrogates for that which is not only *unseen* but *unseeable*. By the same token, however, McCahon's religious paintings may be considered expressions of doubt (i.e., failing fully to see) insofar as their symbols are offered in compensation for that which fundamentally exceeds and eludes realisation as an object of vision and/or thought. Namely, the 'real nature' of the relationship between humanity and divinity, earth and heaven, matter and spirit represented/symbolised in paintings that situate the divine incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and apotheosis of Christ in the New Zealand landscape. This inescapable counterpoise of vision and doubt flavours Brasch's subsequent assessment of the relative successes and failures of McCahon's art. Thus, on the one hand, referring to the 'powerful and unquestioned impulse' that drives McCahon's painting (phrasing that invites interpretation in terms of a visionary 'seeing the necessity to see' or, in psychoanalytic terms, subjective desire), Brasch asserts:

...at times, in... [McCahon's] best work, when impulse is so strong... it creates for itself perforce a set of valid symbols. For some of his symbols *are* valid: they strike home at once, bare, powerful, uncompromising.

On the other hand, however, Brasch also contends that

...it would be a mistake to claim that... [McCahon] usually or even often succeeds in bringing his symbols to life... Colin McCahon is all the time feeling his way towards forms and symbols that will answer his needs; inevitably, since there are no guides before him, he often fumbles and loses his way in blind alleys.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁵ Brasch, 337.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid, 339.

6.1.2 Keith, McNamara

For the purposes of the following discussion, Brasch's qualified endorsement of McCahon as a visionary whose vision, nevertheless, often falters or eludes realisation provides a useful model by which to illustrate the perpetuation of the figure of McCahon's doubt in McCahon discourse. In the latter 1960s and in the 1970s, this perspective is evident, for example, in writing on McCahon by Keith and McNamara. Thus, in Keith's *Auckland Star* piece, 'Paintings with impact of a clenched fist' (as noted in chapter five, a review of the Barry Lett Galleries show *Colin McCahon Recent Paintings. Victory over Death or Practical Religion*), it is suggested that the exhibition in question confronts its audience with 'one man's intensely realised vision of what might be meant by life and death, salvation and resurrection.' At the same time, however, it is significant that Keith ameliorates this judgement with the suggestion that the visionary power of McCahon's work compensates for technical failings. Hence, whilst Keith allows that 'The power of McCahon's vision carries his paintings past the point where technical considerations have any real relevance', he also notes that 'In fact, his technique often comes dangerously close to failure if it had to stand on its own.'⁵⁰⁷ The characterisation of McCahon as a fallible visionary also colours Keith's *Auckland Star* article 'Communicating a vision: Struggle on both sides' (1973) (a review of the Barry Lett Galleries show '*Jet Out From Muriwai*': *McCahon Paintings and Drawings*). Here, Keith opens with the assertion that

Colin McCahon is the most uncompromising of painters. He rarely concerns himself with visual titillation, preferring to aim his works straight for the bedrock – the vision essential for any genuine work of art.

At the same time, however, referring to the astringent text inscribed on some of the works on paper (specifically, the script defining the title of *Rustic bird roost for vultures* (000977, 1973, ref. 83) and the exhortation to 'HOLD THE HORROR' on *Work towards*

⁵⁰⁷ Keith, 'Paintings with impact of a clenched fist'.

the first stations of the Cross (000299, 1973, ref. 84)), Keith suggests that ‘These... inscriptions... seem to indicate moments of great doubt, as if the apparatus of belief was questionable if not the belief itself.’ In consequence, and in harmony with the title of his review article, Keith suggests that ‘Just as ... [McCahon] has to struggle with the insights that drive him to paint, we are obliged to struggle with the images he offers us.’⁵⁰⁸

Keith’s writing notwithstanding, the claim that McCahon’s vision is inconsistent is more insistently reiterated in McNamara’s art criticism. For example, in ‘Astounding “I AM” Revelation: Word Power in Visual Form’ (as noted in chapter five, McNamara’s *New Zealand Herald* review of the aforementioned exhibition *Colin McCahon Recent Paintings*), *Victory over Death 2* is assessed as a ‘dazzling revelation’, whilst less epically-scaled words are criticised for their ‘disfiguring banality’, thus confirming, in McNamara’s view, that McCahon’s ‘successes and his failures are always closely allied.’⁵⁰⁹ Another notable instance is ‘From Magnificent to Meaningless’ (1975) – McNamara’s *New Zealand Herald* review of the Barry Lett Galleries show *Colin McCahon – New Paintings 1975*, wherein McCahon first exhibited the *Urewera Mural* and the series of word and number works on paper entitled *Teaching Aids* (*Teaching Aids 2 (June)* (000004, June 1975, ref. 85), *Teaching Aids 2 (July)* (001514, July 1975, ref. 86), and *Teaching Aids 3* (001347, 1975, ref. 87)). Beginning with the observation that ‘The inequalities and paradoxes of Colin McCahon’s art are displayed as never before’, McNamara goes on to praise the *Urewera Mural* as a ‘magnificent work’. However, the *Teaching Aids* series are denigrated as ‘totally unconvincing... It is hard to find any meaning or artistic merit in these paintings at all.’⁵¹⁰

Whilst the *Urewera Mural* incorporates various non-representational or symbolic forms (e.g., Māori language script, the centrally located, golden-hued *Tau* cross, the

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid, ‘Communicating a vision: Struggle on both sides’, *Auckland Star*, 18 August 1973, Weekender 7.

⁵⁰⁹ McNamara, ‘Astounding “I AM” Revelation’.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid, ‘From Magnificent To Meaningless’, *New Zealand Herald*, 22 August 1975, section 1, 11.

white-on-brick-red star of Te Kooti), it is clear from McNamara's article that he considers it to be, first and foremost, a landscape painting.⁵¹¹ By contrast, the *Teaching Aids* works, with their compartmentalised rows and columns of words and numbers, would seem to demand interpretation in more abstract terms – potential meanings McNamara is, evidently, unwilling to entertain.⁵¹² To this extent, McNamara's article clearly privileges landscape painting over abstract painting – where, moreover, it may be suggested that this privileging testifies to the making of an, ultimately untenable, distinction between 'pictorial' and 'symbolic'. On the basis of this distinction, landscape painting is considered to be a mode of picture-making that delivers its meaning transparently, fully, and self-evidently. By contrast, abstract painting defines a mode of picture-making that renders meaning so opaque and enigmatic as to be, effectively, meaningless.

6.1.3 Curnow

Precisely such a perspective on McNamara's writing is presented in Curnow's *Listener* article 'Devotions unlimited' (1975), in which Curnow directly cites 'From Magnificent To Meaningless' (although, he does not identify McNamara by name). Here, in response to McNamara's article, Curnow retorts:

Now I've heard this story before. The one that goes: (1) McCahon is an erratic genius. (2) When he shows works I understand (landscapes mostly) he's magnificent. (3) When he shows works I don't understand (abstractions more or

⁵¹¹ Thus, in *ibid*, reference is made to 'The dark hills... conveyed by rich, strong forms' that 'breathe out words – the history of the Tuhoe people emerging from the mists in the valleys', and to the *Tau* cross as a 'huge form that is both a massive tree and a fall of light.'

⁵¹² For example, the *Teaching Aids* paintings admit consideration as (1) expressions of ordering, succession, calculation, etc., (2) interrogative juxtapositions of different sign systems (e.g., the English language numbers 'one' to 'ten', the Arabic numerals '1' to '14', the Roman numerals 'I' to 'XIV'), and (3) allusively symbolic (as opposed to literally or mimetically figurative or representational) reflections on the Fourteen Stations of the Cross.

less) he's having another of his off-days. (4) When he shows both sorts in one show I know he's an erratic genius.⁵¹³

Curnow's four-part distillation of McNamara's review article into the form of a tautology humorously exposes the degree to which McNamara's criticism eschews a genuinely open-minded engagement with McCahon's work in favour of the reaffirmation of McNamara's own prejudices. Implicitly, then, Curnow's rebuttal of McNamara constitutes an argument to the effect that assessments of the relative success and failure of McCahon's work are less a reflection of *McCahon's* vision and/or doubt than that of his *critics*. However, in saying this, it remains the case that Curnow's discussion piece reiterates prejudices proper to the traditionalising mode of art criticism or art history. In effect, Curnow dismisses the 'false' vision of a particular critic only to affirm the 'true' vision of the individual art subject called 'McCahon' – an individual whose unique and

⁵¹³ Curnow, 'Devotions unlimited', *New Zealand Listener*, v80, n1871, 11 October 1975, 22. To what degree Curnow's assessment of McNamara's critical predilections may be justified follows from a cursory inspection of some of McNamara's other reviews of McCahon's work. Consider, for example, McNamara, 'Paintings In Calligraphy Are Puzzling', *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1969, section 1, 2 (a review of the written paintings and drawings exhibited in the Barry Lett Galleries show *Colin McCahon*). Clearly, McNamara is unconvinced by these works, which he thinks 'fail to communicate much', notwithstanding a few exceptions where 'a profound sense of atmosphere combines with the message to indicate the possibility of religious painting of great intensity.' McNamara concludes: 'The show exemplifies the typical McCahon process of producing 50 indifferent paintings on the way to a masterpiece.' Also noteworthy is *ibid*, 'Display Just Plain Exasperating', *New Zealand Herald*, 15 March 1972, section 1, 10 (a review of the Barry Lett Galleries show *Colin McCahon, Paintings From This Summer '71 '72, Muriwai & Kurow*). Here, McNamara condemns some works as 'so bad that one suspects a put-on' and, whilst allowing that a few pieces are 'absolutely masterly', ultimately concludes that 'this little exhibition speaks clearly about both the great merits and wilful eccentricities of McCahon's art'. In this case, however, it may be noted that, in apparent contraindication of Curnow's argument, McNamara's most withering criticism is directed towards (broadly figurative) works like *Moby Dick is sighted off Muriwai Beach* (000211, February 1972, ref. 88), whilst his highest praise is reserved for the largely abstract, written painting *Through the Wall of Death: A Banner* (001405, 1972, ref. 89). Finally, one might refer to *ibid*, 'Latest McCahon Exhibition Creates Difficulties', *New Zealand Herald*, 25 August 1976, section 1, 8 (a review of the Barry Lett Galleries show *Colin McCahon, Paintings, Noughts and Crosses, Rocks in the Sky, On the Road*). In relation to these paintings, which, for the most part, are composed of numbers, letters, and other abstract symbols, McNamara suggests: 'Even to the sympathetic eye, much of the work is difficult to follow and the meaning esoteric and private.' McNamara concludes:

Altogether it is a paradoxical, perplexing show with passages of powerful simplicity and at other times pretentiously obscure. Certainly it could be painted by no one but Colin McCahon.

authentic life situation bestows coherence and unity on a body of work that, otherwise, would seem to be incomprehensibly eclectic.

This is evident from Curnow's assertions that (1) 'McCahon's art is impure... a medley of symbolisms: religious, mathematical, linguistic, public and private, painterly and literary', (2) McCahon's 'paintings are wilfully out of the mainstreams of contemporary art', and (3) 'McCahon's forms are eccentric, his enterprise risky'. Here, it may be observed that Curnow's assessment of McCahon's eccentricity precisely reflects the counterpoise of vision and doubt proper to the figure of McCahon's doubt in McCahon discourse. On the one hand, eccentricity exemplifies creative uniqueness and originality – thereby testifying to a *visionary* 'seeing' of that which has, previously, been 'unseen' or, indeed, that which is 'unseeable'. On the other hand, insofar as this vision is, perhaps, only partially glimpsed – either by the artist in question or by critics of the artist's work – eccentricity admits consideration as a symptom of doubt. In the former case, uncertainty flavours the artist's efforts to objectively realise visionary experience; in the latter event, uncertainty colours the critic's evaluations of the efficacy of these realisations. However, for Curnow, McCahon's status as 'the most ambitious and exciting painter' of his generation proves that, ultimately, this eccentricity is less a sign of doubt and insufficiency than of 'the power of the artistic personality to make these symbolisms cohere in the body of the work, the corpus.' It is, therefore, by way of an appeal to McCahon's *vision* that what is, otherwise, a bewilderingly variegated *oeuvre* admits resolution into 'one work, the life work' of the particular art subject called 'McCahon'.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹⁴ Curnow, 'Devotions unlimited'. The degree to which the eccentricity of McCahon's art is moderated by the force of McCahon's individual, artistic vision is a theme reiterated in *ibid*, 'Necessary Protection'. Here, for example, Curnow invokes the term 'McCahon Dada' in acknowledgement of the 'eclecticism' and 'strangeness' of McCahon's work (12). At the same time, however, Curnow affirms that *McCahon's "Necessary Protection,"* is 'a body of work which has the force of a life and which speaks for itself' and that, moreover, demonstrates how McCahon,

Having invented painting in New Zealand... [can] now work in a tradition of his own making. The paintings in this exhibition are in the tradition of McCahon; were it not for him, they could not have been painted. (4)

Indeed, Curnow goes so far as to assert that 'If there's any suggestion this is art talking rather than Colin McCahon it's got to be scotched' (5).

6.1.4 Brown

In the 1980s, Curnow's affirmation of McCahon's vision is mirrored in Brown's *Colin McCahon: Artist* (1984) – the first comprehensive monograph devoted to McCahon's life and work. Here, Brown opens with the assertion that McCahon's work evinces an 'attitude that is religious in its essential nature.' Moreover, whilst acknowledging that McCahon's 'visionary attitude' is complicated by the degree to which he 'sees himself as both a believer and a doubter', Brown goes on to suggest:

...in consideration of the religious testimony of his work, and when cast against the panorama of internationalism in art, McCahon is a prophet in a wilderness bearing witness to the persistence of his unique vision.⁵¹⁵

To this extent, Brown's assessment parallels Curnow's: in the final analysis, McCahon's vision is invoked to compensate for aspects of his work that (in the context of Western modernism, at least) may appear enigmatic or eccentric. Subsequently, the affirmation of McCahon as a visionary underpins Brown's exploration of the tension between faith and doubt in McCahon's *Elias* series paintings of 1959, and the written paintings of 1969 and 1970. In the former case, Brown suggests:

At the root of the *Elias* paintings it is the existential situation that prevails... The *Elias* paintings are a personal confession in which the artist's concern is less with art than with the meaning of life... It is art used to give the conflict of faith and doubt coherence of thought, effort and expression in its most positive form.⁵¹⁶

With regard to *Victory over Death 2* and related works, Brown observes that the '“Victory over death”' one encounters, in *The New English Bible*, as a subtitle to John 10: 40 is 'a victory without which an encounter with the human failings of doubt and the

⁵¹⁵ Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist* (1984), 1, 3.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid*, 117, 119.

manifestation of faith can scarcely be imagined.’⁵¹⁷ In both cases, then, Brown’s discussion implies that the very *existence* of the paintings in question testifies to a triumph or victory of the positive over the negative, vision over doubt. From this perspective, the visionary dimension of the *Elias* paintings and *Victory over Death 2* resides in McCahon’s uniquely acute and perceptive *making visible* that which, previously, has been *invisible* – namely, the nature of the ‘conflict of faith and doubt’.

Moreover, also relevant to the analysis of the figure of McCahon’s doubt in McCahon discourse is the suggestion, in Brown’s closing chapter, that the ‘essence of McCahon’s work’, resulting from his ‘lifetime vision’ and ‘essentially religious consciousness’, defines an ‘autobiographical... unity’, the ‘quality’ of which ‘comes near to being prophetic.’ As Brown explains, further, this is not prophecy in the sense of augury or divination so much as a ‘by nature, speculative’ exploration of ‘the spiritual struggle... between good and evil’. The speculative (i.e., questioning, *doubting*) dimension of McCahon’s prophetic (i.e., *visionary*) work reflects a ‘vision of the universe’ that is ‘in some respects fragmented and... [which] falls short of being totally conceived’ whilst, at the same time, investing in the idea of ‘a coherent governing principle’ or ‘sense of morality – a morality of reverence’ for ‘“the world as it ought to be and as it will by grace become”’. ⁵¹⁸ In other words, Brown’s contention is that, however much McCahon’s *oeuvre* testifies to a conception of the world that is fragmentary and doubting, at the same time, it also bears witness to an impulse towards a more complete understanding – an impulse sustained, in the final analysis, by a *vision* of a universal, existential, and moral order *to come*. To this extent, Brown, precisely, conceives of McCahon’s vision in terms of an impossible seeing the unseeable. Moreover, insofar as Brown grounds McCahon’s visionary experience in a wish or *desire* for a better world, his discussion also illustrates the manner by which, always already, McCahon’s visionary ‘seeing the unseeable’ also is ‘seeing the necessity to see’ (i.e., an expression of an

⁵¹⁷ Ibid, 148.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid, 206, citing John Caselberg, ‘Introduction’ in *A Retrospective Exhibition: M.T. Woollaston, Colin McCahon, Auckland City Art Gallery, May 1963*, exh. cat. (Auckland, 1963), 4.

imperative to realise the impossible and, thereby, of subjective desire fulfilled in endlessly missing its aim).

6.1.5 Pound

In the early 1990s, the contradictions proper to the *point de capiton* ‘McCahon’s doubt’ are further reiterated in writing by Francis Pound. Exemplary, in this regard, is the *Art Monthly Australia* article ‘Colin McCahon and the language of practical religion’ (1990) (a commentary on the Institute of Contemporary Art, London exhibition *Colin McCahon: The Language of Practical Religion* (1990)). Here, I would suggest that, whilst generally eschewing the overt appeals to McCahon’s biography made by Curnow and Brown, nevertheless, Pound echoes their affirmations of the visionary (i.e., unique, authentic) status of McCahon and his work. Thus, Pound denies that the ‘strenuous and tragically dramatic... religiosity’ of McCahon’s paintings is merely a ‘pictorial attitude – a form, as it were, of post-modern quotationalism, or even a “critique” of Christianity.’⁵¹⁹ On the contrary, Pound insists that the *genuinely* religious dimension of McCahon’s work is a key component defining his ‘strangeness, the very eccentricity of his place in the larger modernist endeavour.’⁵²⁰ Still further, Pound invokes the ‘vast’ and ‘sublime’ I

⁵¹⁹ Pound, ‘Colin McCahon and the language of practical religion’, 11-12.

⁵²⁰ Ibid, 12. By way of elaborating McCahon’s ‘eccentricity’, Pound suggests that McCahon’s vision of art is, to some degree, opposed to modernism. Invoking McCahon’s late, written painting *I applied my mind* (001660, 1980-82, ref. 90), Pound suggests that

McCahon... gives a painting that is both the emptied, independent field of modernist painting, and a picture of a sky, on which God’s words may appear... He may make works which aspire to an absolute pictorial autonomy. But he also makes pictures of landscape – the very thing which... the modernist does not. (ibid)

Also relevant to the notion of McCahon’s eccentricity, in the context of modernist painting, Pound asserts that

McCahon... is... *ex-modern*. He is a painter outside the centres of the modern. His is an art of the periphery, at once modernist and not, at once inside and outside of the whole high modernist endeavour. (ibid)

Many of these ideas are reiterated in ibid, ‘McCahon, Skies, Stars, Writing’, (see, especially, 155-57).

AM calligraphs of *Gate III* and *Victory over Death 2*, suggesting that, in each case, ‘what emerges from... [McCahon’s] doubt and... devotion is a kind of billboard of consummate grandeur, advertising the Christian God’ and that, moreover, ‘If McCahon paints a shadowed and barely visible ‘I AM’, as the mark of a doubt, the affirmation and answering ‘I AM’, entirely outshines it.’⁵²¹

However, in addition to affirming the uniqueness and originality of McCahon’s vision (i.e., the degree to which McCahon’s work testifies to a seeing of that which, previously, has been unseen), Pound also alludes to the manner by which McCahon’s vision involves a ‘seeing the necessity to see’ – i.e., subjective desire understood in terms of an imperative to realise the impossible. In ‘Colin McCahon and the language of practical religion’, this is evident from Pound’s suggestion that McCahon’s use of Christian texts in his paintings

...simply answers to the announcement made by... Allen Curnow, that ‘the New Zealand poet is unlikely to escape wholly the character of prophet to his people’. The artist is the prophet who cries out in the *wilderness* – another standard topos of McCahon’s time and place.⁵²²

Here, Pound is referring to the manner by which New Zealand’s European colonisers and their descendents invested in the prophetic voice in order to ameliorate their alienated experience of a land they found to be ‘painfully empty... silent... full only of solitude... lacking a history and a past.’⁵²³ This reveals to what degree New Zealand artists and

⁵²¹ Ibid, 12. It may be noted that a parapraxis accompanies Pound’s assertion, in relation to the major calligraphy of *Victory over Death 2*, that ‘If McCahon paints a shadowed and barely visible ‘I AM’, as the mark of a doubt, the affirmation and answering ‘I AM’, entirely outshines it.’ What is ‘shadowed and barely visible’ is, in fact, ‘AM’.

⁵²² Ibid, ‘Colin McCahon and the language of practical religion’, 12, citing Allen Curnow, ‘Introduction’ in *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-50, chosen by Allen Curnow* (Christchurch: Caxton Press, 1951), 22. Similar points are made in ibid, ‘McCahon, Skies, Stars, Writing,’ 162-63, and, in ibid, ‘Endless Yet Never, Death, the Prophetic Voice and McCahon’s Last Painting’ in McCahon, Pound, and Brown, *Colin McCahon: The Last Painting*, exh. cat. (Auckland: Peter Webb Galleries Ltd., 1993), 3-5.

⁵²³ Pound, ‘Colin McCahon and the language of practical religion’, 11.

writers of European extraction, finding themselves ‘In a country which seemed without history, in which history was experienced only as a loss, as an elsewhere’ embraced the ‘task... to trace over the emptiness, to fill it with the marks of the old legends and myths.’ From this perspective, McCahon’s vision admits consideration as responding to the imperative for ‘A past which was, as it were, at a remove, which had not occurred here, but elsewhere in Europe... to be reconstituted for local consumption... to be invented anew for this place.’⁵²⁴

The manner by which McCahon’s vision is construed in terms of a paradoxical ‘seeing the unseeable’ or ‘seeing the necessity to see’ also is evident in the essay Pound contributed to the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Colin McCahon: The Last Painting*: ‘Endless Yet Never, Death, the Prophetic Voice and McCahon’s Last Painting’ (1993). Here, Pound discusses one of McCahon’s final works – *I considered all the acts of oppression* (000169, c.1982, ref. 91) – which, in Pound’s view, ‘may be seen as the culminating utterance of McCahon’s lifelong use of the prophetic voice.’⁵²⁵ *I considered all the acts of oppression* is noteworthy insofar as it presents four blocks of painted script (drawn from Ecclesiastes), each of which is contained within pictorial sections defined by a faintly stated I-form. However, on the right hand side of the painting, there is rectangular field of dark ground, free of painted calligraphy. As Pound relates,

We might think it a sign that the painting is ‘unfinished’, except that further writing follows after it, writing which leaves it as a singular, rectangular gap: the writing which says ‘endless yet never’.⁵²⁶

On this basis, Pound is inclined, rather, to read the dark rectangle as a sign of ‘the unfinished because unfinishable, the unrepresented because unrepresentable’.⁵²⁷ To this

⁵²⁴ Ibid, 12-13.

⁵²⁵ Ibid, ‘Endless Yet Never’, 3.

⁵²⁶ Ibid, 11.

⁵²⁷ Ibid, 11-12.

extent, Pound's interpretation affirms that the dark rectangle is a sign of McCahon's 'visionary seeing the unseeable'. Indeed, Pound observes that

Darkness is... the very mark of the deepest depths of visibility – of the unseeable. It is the abyss where speech is rendered mute. It is the colour of a specifically modernist Sublime.⁵²⁸

In support of this idea, Pound appeals to the discussion in Foucault's *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970). Here, Foucault reflects on the nature of human subjectivity as the 'locus of an empirico-transcendental doublet' or a 'paradoxical' tension between the '*cogito*' or 'self-consciousness' and the 'unthought' or 'unconscious'.⁵²⁹ Bending Foucault's argument to his own purposes, Pound proposes that the visionary dimension of the black rectangle in *I considered all the acts of oppression* lies not so much in the possibility it affords of illuminating the unconscious as in its confronting 'Death as the final limit of representation.' In consequence, Pound concludes:

Here, then, in this black rectangle, in a painting which speaks of Death, in his final painting before his own death, is McCahon's last impossible attempt, after so many attempts – 'endless but never' – to represent the unrepresentable: Death.⁵³⁰

Pound's reference to McCahon's 'many attempts – "endless but never" ', to represent the 'unrepresentable' or realise the 'impossible' affirms that McCahon's vision, in *I considered all the acts of oppression*, is not merely a 'seeing the unseeable' but also a 'seeing the necessity to see' (i.e., an expression of subjective desire fulfilled in endlessly missing its aim).

⁵²⁸ Ibid, 12.

⁵²⁹ Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1970, originally published as *Les Mots et les choses, Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1966), 322-23, 326.

⁵³⁰ Pound, 'Endless Yet Never', 12.

6.1.6 Simmons

Recent scholarship produced by Simmons and Butler, either working independently or in collaboration, also evinces sophisticated and nuanced engagements with the question of the visionary dimension of McCahon's work. Although limitations of time and space preclude a properly thorough consideration of this body of writing, in these final two subsections, I address two essays, previously mentioned in the thesis Introduction: Simmons' '“I shall go and wake him”: The *figura* of Lazarus in Colin McCahon's Painting', and Butler's *Colin McCahon in Australia*. From the perspective of the present study, this writing is of especial interest insofar as it enlivens an understanding of the visionary dimension of McCahon's work that is *not* defined, exclusively, in terms of the unique and perspicacious capacity by which the individual art subject called 'McCahon' sees that which, previously, has been unseen. On the contrary, I would suggest that, in the two essays under consideration, one finds a conception of McCahon's 'vision' in terms of that which, as a matter of structural necessity, is *intrinsic* to language-mediated expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making *per se*. By way of elaborating this point, I propose to read certain assertions made by Simmons and/or Butler in light of a Lacanian model of subjectivity – with particular reference to the complex temporality of the *point de capiton* and the structure of subjective desire. In the present subsection, I apply this perspective to Simmons' elucidation of McCahon's vision in terms of (1) Auerbach's exegesis of '*figura*', (2) the nature of 'parables' or 'parabolic narratives', and (3) Derrida's conception of the 'messianic'. In the following subsection, I adopt a Lacanian standpoint in relation to Butler's closely related analysis of McCahon's vision in terms of the 'artistic posterity' or 'afterlife' of McCahon's work.

Beginning with Simmons' essay, then, I would suggest, firstly, that *figura* are synonymous with *points de capiton* insofar as they function as *figures of discourse*. The question of the visionary arises insofar as, according to the account presented in Auerbach's *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (1959), *figura* admit consideration not only as forms of perception or rhetoric but also of 'prophecy or

prefiguration'.⁵³¹ As Simmons explains, this sense of *figura* is particularly evident in 'biblical exegesis' where '*figura* became the relation between two persons, events or circumstances, the first of which is a prefiguration of the second' so that, for example, 'The raising of Lazarus... was read as a prefiguration of the Resurrection of Christ.'⁵³² Here, it may be noted that the prophetic dimension of *figura* harmonises with the complex temporality proper to *points de capiton* such that, as previously discussed, always already, meaning precipitates *as* perpetuated or crystallises *as* that which *will be what it was* – which is to say (at least, from the idealising and rationalising perspective of consciousness) that meaning *is as* envisioned or prophesied.

In part, Simmons invokes Auerbach's conception of *figura* in order to draw parallels between the presentation of the Lazarus story in McCahon's *Practical Religion* and the presentation of the gospels in biblical texts. Specifically, Simmons refers to the manner by which the use of marginal references in certain editions of the Bible generates the 'impression of the text as spread out in a timeless continuum before us' so that we 'think of connections between parts of the book entirely in terms of words and phrases.'⁵³³ From a Lacanian perspective, the scriptures, thus conceived, define an unconscious, synchronic metonymy (i.e., the 'timeless continuum') metaphorically becoming as a conscious, diachronic metonymy within which, by virtue of the repression of difference, one discerns insistent repetitions of the same – that is to say, certain 'words and phrases' (in short, *figura*), the meaning of which *appears* to be stable and (pre-)determined. As Simmons points out, McCahon's painting 'replicates this process of "spreading out" in

⁵³¹ Erich Auerbach, '“Figura”' in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, originally published Meridian Books, 1959), 29.

⁵³² Simmons, '“I shall go and wake him”', 12. See also Auerbach, '“Figura”', 58, where it is asserted:

Figural prophecy implies the interpretation of one worldly event through another; the first signifies the second, the second fulfills the first. Both remain historical events; yet both, looked at this way have something provisional and incomplete about them; they point to one another and both point to something in the future, something still to come, which will be the actual, real, and definitive event.

⁵³³ Simmons, '“I shall go and wake him”', 14.

repeated and carefully highlighted letters and words’ that serve ‘to fragment but also to hold down the text’ so that ‘We are aware that every word counts.’⁵³⁴ From a Lacanian standpoint, this simultaneity of meaning ‘held down’ *and* ‘fragmented’ recalls the manner by which *points de capiton*, emerging by virtue of the insistent return of repressed identities-in-difference, bear witness to meaning that *is as* reiterated (‘every word counts’, so to speak) and *is as* fading (becoming ambiguous).

The paradoxical nature of meaning that *is as* reiterated and *is as* fading also is implicit in Simmons’ consideration of the ‘mode of narration’ of ‘McCahon’s retelling the story of Lazarus’ in terms of the ‘parable’ or ‘parabolic narrative’.⁵³⁵ Here, it may be noted that, in accordance with metonymic combination and contexture of signs, ‘the parable’ is a collection of signs that is, itself, a sign taking its place in more complex semiotic organisations. Hence, like any sign or ensemble of signs, the parable admits consideration as a figure of discourse – a species of *figura* – and, to this extent, bears witness to a reciprocity of metonymic and metaphoric functions. Simmons alludes to the former function in noting that ‘the biblical parables have to do with their own working: parables also tend to be parables about parable. Among other things they are about their own efficacy.’⁵³⁶ In other words, insofar as parables are ‘parts’ that refer to a ‘whole’ (i.e., the form of synecdoche, which is, precisely, a kind of metonymy), they exemplify the movement among signifying alternatives, within which, in any given iteration, it is always possible to determine the reiteration of a same by virtue of the repression of difference. The metaphoric dimension of the parable is implicit in Simmons’ observation that ‘The distinctive feature of a parable... is the use of a realistic story to express another reality or truth not otherwise expressible.’ By way of illustrating this property, Simmons refers to the sectioning of a conic surface in the shape of a parabola – a curve that, in the fashion of a cometary orbit, ‘traces its graceful loop from infinity and back out to infinity again.’ As Simmons explains, further,

⁵³⁴ Ibid, 14.

⁵³⁵ Ibid, 16-17.

⁵³⁶ Ibid, 17.

When this image is taken as the parable as the working of parable in scripture, it suggests that parable is the indirect indication, at a distance, of something that cannot be described directly, like that imaginary invisible cone or the sun, or like that inaccessible place from which the comet comes and to which it returns.

On which basis, Simmons proposes that

A parabolic narrative is... in some way governed at its origin and at its end, by the infinitely distant and invisible, by something that transcends altogether direct presentation. Something we don't or can't see.⁵³⁷

To this extent, Simmons' commentary resonates with what has been said about the 'hidden', metaphoric dimension of *points de capiton* – i.e., the real-as-impossible function of pure difference proper to the operation of the unary trait. Equivalently, one may say that, insofar as the 'trajectory' of a parabolic narrative is 'governed' by an 'imaginary', 'invisible', or 'inaccessible' focus or centre of meaning, it unfolds in accordance with what Žižek refers to as 'the *curved space of desire*' in which 'resides... the object-cause of desire'.⁵³⁸

Having elaborated 'McCahon's parabolic use of the *figura* of Lazarus' in *Practical Religion*, Simmons draws an illustrative parallel with Derrida's discussion of faith in terms of a 'messianic structure', as presented in 'The Villanova Roundtable' and the essay 'Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone' (1996).⁵³⁹ Here, the critical point is that the messianic structure of acts of faith, precisely, echoes the paradoxical manner by which, in the *figura* and the parabolic narrative, always already, meaning *is as* reiterated (which is to say, *envisioned, predetermined*) and *is as* fading (which is to say, becoming ambiguous, subject to doubt, *indeterminate* – if not, *indeterminable*). Thus, in 'The Villanova Roundtable', Derrida

⁵³⁷ Ibid, 17.

⁵³⁸ Žižek, *How to read Lacan*, 77.

⁵³⁹ Simmons, '“I shall go and wake him”', 21-22.

conceives of faith in terms of a ‘universal... messianic structure’ that is ‘not limited to what one calls messianisms, that is, Jewish, Christian, or Islamic messianism, to these determinate figures and forms of the Messiah’ whilst, in ‘Faith and Knowledge’, Derrida expresses the indeterminate nature of ‘*the messianic, or messianicity without messianism*’ in terms of

*...the opening to the future or to the coming of the other as the advent of justice, but without horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration.*⁵⁴⁰

By way of anticipating matters for further discussion in the following subsection and in section 6.3, in ‘The Villanova Roundtable’, Derrida states explicitly that the faith under consideration is to be understood in a Kierkegaardian sense – namely, as that which ‘cannot be simply mastered or domesticated or taught or logically understood, a faith that is paradoxical.’⁵⁴¹ Applying this idea with the aid of a quotation from ‘Faith and Knowledge’, Simmons suggests that ‘McCahon’s parabolic use of the *figura* of Lazarus’ exemplifies the manner by which the ‘act of faith “exceeds through its structure, all intuition, all proof, all knowledge” ’ and that, in consequence, there is enlivened the possibility that McCahon embraces the ‘structural possibility of the religious without professing a determinate, orthodox faith’.⁵⁴² That is to say, as Simmons relates, further, a faith residing in an ‘interspace of undecidability’ between ‘some particular, determinate religious content’ and the very ‘possibility... of such’.⁵⁴³

⁵⁴⁰ See Derrida, ‘The Villanova Roundtable’, 22, 23, and *ibid*, ‘Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of “Religion” at the Limits of Reason Alone’ in Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (eds), *Religion* (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1998, originally published as *La Religion: Séminaire de Capri sous la direction de Jacques Derrida et Gianni Vattimo* (Éditions de Seuil, 1996)), 17.

⁵⁴¹ Derrida in ‘The Villanova Roundtable’, 21-22, cited in Simmons, ‘ “I shall go and wake him” ’, 26.

⁵⁴² Simmons, ‘ “I shall go and wake him” ’, 21, citing Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge’, 63.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid*, 25. Again, anticipating matters for discussion in section 6.3, Simmons suggests that McCahon’s investment in the structural possibilities of the religious apart from any particular, determined religious position demonstrates that McCahon’s ‘apparent dated’ references to Christian themes are

That this paradoxical, undecidable faith is intrinsic to expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making is further evident from Derrida's assertion, in 'The Villanova Roundtable', that faith, thus conceived, is 'presupposed by the most radical deconstructive gesture.'⁵⁴⁴ In other words, the very *possibility* of performing a deconstruction (i.e., a disassembling and reassembling of the field of meaning that, to some degree, proceeds on the basis of doubting the truth that is taken for granted) rests on a belief in the *efficacy of* deconstruction. Insofar as this belief admits no objective justification, it must be considered a visionary act of faith. In this regard, an illuminating parallel may be drawn with what, in *Seminar XV*, Lacan considers to be a necessary condition for traversing fantasy or performing the 'psychoanalytic act' – namely:

...this leap that I have called the pass (*la passe*)... one could say that everything in the organisation of psychoanalysis is done to conceal that this leap is a leap.

and, furthermore,

...in fact... a way of being very much on time – not the present-rapidly-becoming-past of some artistic tradition, but rather the present-pointing-to-the-future of the structure of *figura*. (25-26)

Furthermore, Simmons characterises this approach as

The exceptional place that McCahon occupies in terms of the 'religious' today. It is an exceptional place less in terms of the question of the religious than in terms of the religious as a question. (26)

⁵⁴⁴ Derrida in 'The Villanova Roundtable', 22. This assertion recalls the earlier commentary in *ibid*, *Specters of Marx, The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans Peggy Kamuf with an introduction by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2006 (1994), originally published as *Spectres de Marx: État de la dette, le travail du deuil, et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993)), 74, where the messianic is defined as

...what remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction... a certain experience of the emancipatory promise... the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice – which we distinguish from law or right and even from human rights...

...what is effectively involved in the necessary pre-supposition of the psychoanalytic act... [is] what we call an act of faith.

An act of faith... in the subject supposed to know and precisely by a subject who has just learned what is involved in the subject supposed to know, at least in an exemplary operation, which is that of psychoanalysis.⁵⁴⁵

Insofar as a radically contingent affirmation or leap of faith in the efficacy of this endeavour is a necessary precondition for performing a deconstruction (or, in psychoanalytic parlance, traversing fantasy), Derrida suggests that faith is 'On the side of messianicity'. That is to say, faith expresses the manner by which 'every speech act is fundamentally a promise' where

This universal structure of the promise, of the expectation for the future, for the coming, and the fact that this expectation of the coming has to do with justice – that is what I call the messianic structure.⁵⁴⁶

Here, I would suggest that, in place of what Derrida terms a 'speech act', one may substitute 'expression of subjectivity/meaning-making' – in relation to which I have suggested that, from a Lacanian perspective, always already, meaning *is as* envisioned or prophesied (albeit, a vision sustained only insofar as it is fading, becoming ambiguous, becoming open to question). Furthermore, insofar as messianicity defines faith *as* faith in the coming of justice, implicitly, it expresses what Simmons (reshaping, for his own purposes, Derrida's comment above) refers to as

⁵⁴⁵ Lacan, *Seminar XV*, Seminar 10, 21 February 1968, 3, 4. Lacan's reference to 'An act of faith... in the subject supposed to know... by a subject who has just learned what is involved in the subject supposed to know' underscores the paradox of psychoanalysis. Namely, that, as noted in the thesis Introduction, the analysand becoming as an analyst understands that 'The term of analysis consists in the fall of the subject supposed to know and his reduction to the arrival of this o-object, as cause of the division of the subject which comes in its place.' That is to say, in traversing fantasy or performing the psychoanalytic act, the analysand becoming as an analyst invests in the ineffable 'cause' of divided subjectivity (i.e., *objet petit a*) and, in so doing, indefinitely defers self-realisation in favour of sublimating desire into drive.

⁵⁴⁶ Derrida in 'The Villanova Roundtable', 23.

...a fundamental ethical promise, for that faith answers to the indeterminate hope of an unforeseeable future, an always-yet-to-come, a hope that, because it is always yet to come, no knowledge could ever accommodate or master.⁵⁴⁷

This is simply to reaffirm that, insofar as it entails an impossible, visionary seeing the unseeable, the messianic bears witness to the insistent return of repressed identities-in-difference and, to this extent, is an expression of subjective desire: seeing the necessity to see. In relation to the contradictory duality of vision and doubt proper to the *point de capiton* ‘McCahon’s doubt’, it may be suggested that the messianic structure of McCahon’s work is that by virtue of which the realisation of desire is envisioned *and* subject to doubt. By way of anticipating the discussion of McCahon’s questioning faith in section 6.3, this is precisely to say that, always already, McCahon’s ‘prophetic vision of the world as it ought to be and as it will by grace become’ is a matter of vision *and* doubt, a vision that *is* only insofar *as* it is doubting – in short, a *vision of doubt*.

6.1.7 Butler

In Butler’s *Colin McCahon in Australia* and related works, the conception of McCahon’s ‘artistic posterity’ or ‘afterlife’ harmonises closely with Simmons’ understanding of McCahon’s work in terms of *figura*, parable, and the messianic and, similarly, invites interpretation in terms of the structure of subjective desire. The resonances in question are, immediately, apparent from Butler’s reference to the ‘universal, globe-spanning, messianic fate... [McCahon’s] work understands for itself’ – which Butler also terms ‘McCahon’s *afterlife*... the fate of his works once he is dead.’⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁷ Simmons, ‘“I shall go and wake him”’, 25.

⁵⁴⁸ Butler, *Colin McCahon in Australia*, 10, 13. Subsequently, Butler characterises the afterlife of McCahon’s work in the following terms:

...McCahon’s work not only was made with its artistic posterity in mind, but in some way this afterlife is the very subject of the work... it is through its reflection on its afterlife that his work seeks to bring this afterlife about. In a prophetic or even self-prophetic mode, the future fate of the work is predicated and incorporated from the very beginning. And it is this particular quality that characterises all great art. it is precisely this quality that makes it great. (30-31)

As Butler also explains, this ‘messianic fate’ or ‘afterlife’ is inherently contradictory insofar as it is (1) the ‘fulfilment of a potential already in the work, a destiny already plotted and planned for by McCahon himself while alive and by his work after he is dead’, and (2) ‘not something that McCahon could have foreseen, predicted or ensured, either through any series of worldly actions or through any inherent quality in his art.’⁵⁴⁹ Insofar as the afterlife of McCahon’s work is predicated on a visionary leap of faith that *there will be* an afterlife, it demonstrates that

...there is always something unknown about McCahon’s work, even to McCahon himself... even if we can see McCahon expressly thematising or speaking about his artistic posterity or the afterlife of his work, there is also something about it that must escape him, and that is how we respond to it here and now.⁵⁵⁰

Subsequently, Butler elaborates this ‘unknown’ quantity in terms of the manner by which, insofar as it *has* an afterlife, the ‘influence’ or authority of McCahon’s *oeuvre* defines an ‘impossible equivalence’ obtaining between two, ostensibly, mutually exclusive factors: (1) ‘worldly actions’ or social and cultural ends that McCahon’s work serves, and (2) an ‘innate quality in the work’ that it carries into the world. In the former case, the locus of the meaning of McCahon’s work lies outside it – it is a meaning transcending the work; in the latter event, the locus of the meaning of McCahon’s work lies within it – it is a meaning immanent to the work. As Butler points out, the ‘impossible equivalence’ in question arises to the extent that, in the final analysis, neither mode of explanation fully accounts for the afterlife of McCahon’s work and, indeed, *in extremis*, transforms into or betrays a dependence on its opposite. Thus it is that, in exhausting appeals to that which lies outside the work (i.e., the afterlife of the work explained in terms of its social and cultural context), one is forced to confront the very thing this explanation represses: the meaning of the work in and of itself. Similarly, in exhausting appeals to that which lies inside the work (i.e., the afterlife of the work

Here, I should point out that the idea of McCahon’s afterlife also is discussed in Butler and Simmons, ‘Practical Religion: On the After-life of Colin McCahon’, 121, and *ibid.*, ‘“The Sound of Painting”’, 329-30.

⁵⁴⁹ Butler, *Colin McCahon in Australia*, 10-11.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

explained in terms of some isolable, intrinsic quality that the work passes on to other works by other artists), one is forced into a confrontation with that which this explanation represses: the meaning of the work in its social and cultural context.⁵⁵¹

Butler's resolution of this logical conundrum is of particular relevance to the concerns of the present study insofar as he invokes a Lacanian model of subjectivity, alluding to the place of the ineffable *objet petit a* in the Lacanian formalisation of the fantasy, $\$ \diamond a$. In this regard, Butler's appeal to Lacanian theory is made by way of Žižek's *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and out* (1992) where, among other things, Žižek presents a Lacanian analysis of the conception of the 'authority' underlying divine revelation in Søren Kierkegaard's essay 'Of the Difference between a Genius and an Apostle' (1849). Here, the instrumental point is that the logical aporia Butler identifies as proper to the authority underpinning the afterlife of McCahon's work parallels the antinomy arising in the context of Kierkegaard's discussion of the ground of the authority of divine revelation. That is to say, divine authority presents a paradox insofar as, strictly speaking, it resides in neither the content or meaning of an authoritative statement (e.g., a divine Commandment or, in relation to considerations of the afterlife of McCahon's work, the extrinsic, social and cultural context) nor the nature, character, temperament, life, actions, etc. of an authoritative person (e.g., a divinely ordained prophet or apostle or, in relation to considerations of the afterlife of McCahon's work, an intrinsic feature of the work).⁵⁵²

⁵⁵¹ Ibid, 35-36.

⁵⁵² See Ibid, 36-38, and Žižek, 'Why Is Every Act a Repetition?', 94-97. Here, I note that Žižek refers to the version of Kierkegaard's essay published in *The Present Age* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962). However, in order to be consistent with my references to Kierkegaard's writing in section 6.3, I will cite the version published in Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (eds), *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXIV, The Book On Adler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, originally written 1847 and originally published as 'Tvende ethisk-religieuse Smaa-Afhandlinger' [Two Minor Ethical-Religious Essays] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1849)).

Let us, briefly, outline the antinomy Kierkegaard's discussion enlivens, and Žižek's response. In the first place, in relation to the ground of the authority of an authoritative statement Kierkegaard asserts:

Žižek expresses the problem thus: 'If... Christ's authority is contained neither in his personal qualities nor in the content of his teaching, in what *does* it reside?' ⁵⁵³ Applying

Is authority the profundity of the doctrine, its excellence, its brilliance? Not at all... Authority... is something that remains unchanged, something that one cannot acquire by having perfectly understood the doctrine. *Authority is a specific quality that enters from somewhere else and qualitatively asserts itself precisely when the content of the statement or the act is made a matter of indifference esthetically.* (179)

As Žižek puts it: 'we obey a statement of authority because it has authority, not because its content is wise, profound, etc.' (94). Kierkegaard goes on to suggest that, given the 'eternal essential qualitative difference' obtaining 'Between God and a human being', authority resides in the status of being a divinely ordained 'apostle':

The paradoxical-religious relation (which, quite rightly, cannot be thought but only believed) *appears when God appoints a specific human being to have divine authority...* (181)

On this basis, Kierkegaard asserts that 'As God-man, Christ possesses the specific quality of authority' (182) and, in consequence, the authority of Christ's statements (such as, for example, the promise of 'eternal life') 'consists not in the statement but in the fact that it is Christ who has said it' (184). To this extent (as Žižek points out, 94), Kierkegaard seems to privilege the person of Christ or the teacher over the content of Christ's assertions or the teaching.

However, secondly, and in apparent contraindication of his previous argument, Kierkegaard allows that, in seeking to 'demonstrate that he has authority... An apostle has no other evidence than his own statement' (186) and, in this respect,

Just as little as a person sent into the city with a letter has anything to do with the content of the letter but only with delivering it... so an apostle primarily has only to be faithful in his duty, which is to carry out his mission. (186-87)

In Žižek's view, this demonstrates how the divinely ordained apostle (whose person supposedly takes priority over the content of any message) is 'reduced to his role of a carrier of some foreign message, he is totally abrogated as a person, all that matters is the content of the message' (94). As Žižek relates, further, this antinomy defines the 'paradox of authority' – the manner by which a person in authority (i) compels obedience 'irrespective of the content of his statements' and yet (ii) is a person whose authority resides in nothing more than being the 'neutral carrier... of some transcendent message' (95).

As a final point, I should acknowledge that, in the context of McCahon discourse (and, in particular, in the context of a consideration of McCahon's vision), Kierkegaard's essay occupies a central place in Simmons, ' "I AM": Colin McCahon Genius or Apostle', *Interstices, Journal of Architecture and Related Arts*, v7, 2006. Whilst I address some of its themes in my discussion of Butler's *Colin McCahon in Australia*, I will not engage with Simmons' essay directly (although, I would concede that it is deserving of a comprehensive treatment in its own right).

⁵⁵³ Žižek, 'Why Is Every Act a Repetition?', 95-96.

the Lacanian logic of fantasy, Žižek locates the source of the compulsion to obey in ‘the empty space of *intersection* between... two sets... personal features and... teaching’ – that is to say, ‘in... [an] unfathomable X... which corresponds exactly to what Lacan called *objet petit a*.’⁵⁵⁴ On the basis of the elaboration of the ‘formalisation’ of the fantasy presented in chapter four, it should be apparent that what Žižek refers to as ‘personal features’ and ‘teaching’ is synonymous with $\$$. Namely, the ‘ex-centric’ or ‘barred’ subjectivity that exceeds and eludes the metaphysical distinction between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, and which defines an ‘intersection’ or tension between conscious and unconscious dimensions of the signifying chain. In placing *objet petit a* in the space of intersection between two empty sets, Žižek affirms the Lacanian understanding that expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making also define a structurally necessary counterpoise between the order of the possible (i.e., the tension between conscious and unconscious dimensions of the signifying chain) and the order of the real-as-impossible (i.e., the metaphoric function of pure difference implicated in the insistent return of the repressed or, in the topological language of *Seminar IX*, the ‘cut of \varnothing ’) such that subjective desire invites interpretation in terms of an impetus to recover that which *is* as primordially lost and to resolve that which *is as* fundamentally irreducible – namely, the ineffable *objet petit a*.

By way of Žižek’s Lacanian reading of Kierkegaard, then, Butler applies the logic of fantasy to the functions of the divine *and/or* the artist in order to present an understanding of the ground of the authority or greatness of McCahon *and/or* McCahon’s art. With reference to Žižek’s diagrammatic representation of the Lacanian matheme of fantasy, $\$ \diamond a$, in the form of the intersecting, empty sets ‘personal description’ and ‘teaching’,⁵⁵⁵ Butler invokes *objet petit a* to account for the ‘strange excess produced out of nothing’

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid, 96.

⁵⁵⁵ The diagram in question appears in *ibid*, and is reproduced Butler, *Colin McCahon in Australia*, 38.

that is, in the final analysis, the ground of the authority (or compelling quality) in divine and/or artistic revelation.⁵⁵⁶ Still further, Butler's succinct definition of *objet petit a* as

...that strange excessive object of desire we find in the other (although it is not really there and is just a reflection of ourselves) that produces the appearance of a secret to be deciphered and that sets interpretation in motion...⁵⁵⁷

affirms that, as noted in chapter four, there is *no* literal or actual *object* of desire. Rather, in consciousness, there is only 'interpretation in motion' via the positing of an endless series of signifying alternatives or imaginary surrogates for *objet petit a*. To put the matter in equivalent terms, this is also to reiterate that subjective experience, as desiring, defines what Lacan refers to, in *Seminar II*, as the 'lack of being whereby the being exists.' That is to say, subjectivity is *being in becoming* – the condition of continually being impelled on a trajectory through what Žižek refers to as the '*curved space of desire*'. It is from this perspective, I would suggest, that one might read Butler's account of the retroactive realisation of McCahon's artistic posterity (i.e., the recognition of the 'greatness' of his art):

...McCahon, like Christ, can do nothing to persuade us, but must await our decision to believe. This is a pure act without precedent and before which the spectator does not even properly exist: in front of his work, we are literally 'born again'.⁵⁵⁸

Strictly speaking, the sense that, in a particular time and place, one 'decides to believe' (i.e., makes a leap of faith) is precisely of the order of imaginary idealisations and rationalisations of consciousness. From the perspective of the subjectivity that is as becoming or is as desiring, the 'pure act', to which Butler alludes, is neither simply nor immediately an expression of any 'one that is conscious'. On the contrary, by virtue of the subjectivity defined in terms of $\$ \diamond a$, always already it is the case that the conscious one *is as* continually *being given to believe* and *is as* continually *being birthed*. As

⁵⁵⁶ Butler, *Colin McCahon in Australia*, 38.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

previously suggested, in consciousness, the exemplary expression or symptom of this way of being-as-desiring is the serial determination of signs (or assumption of perspectives on the world) equivalent to the positing of an endless series of signifying alternatives or imaginary surrogates for *objet petit a*. As noted in chapter five (with regard to ground of the meaning of the sign ‘the *Malady* series’), the manner by which any determinations are sustained only in their ambiguity testifies to the impossibility of attaining the object(ive) of desire. Paradoxically, however, it is *in* the very *reiteration* of this ‘failure’ that desire is ‘fulfilled’. Thus, in the final analysis, the decision to believe in the ‘greatness’, ‘authority’, or significance of the individual art subject called ‘McCahon’ or ‘McCahon’s art’ testifies to desire fulfilled as nothing more than what, in Žižek’s parlance, may be termed the ‘radical contingency of naming’. That is to say, the radical contingency (or leap of faith) on which basis serial determinations of the field of meaning are, in each iteration, conceivable as metonymic ensembles of less complex signs, within which, by virtue of the repression of difference, one discerns the repetition of a same – e.g., the names ‘McCahon’, ‘McCahon’s art’, ‘McCahon’s visionary art’, ‘McCahon’s great art’, and so on.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁹ To state the matter equivalently, as previously suggested, in conscious diachrony, the serial determination of (the meaning of) signs is synonymous with the manner by which, moment by moment, one determines or assumes a perspective on a world. In accordance with metonymic combination and contexture of signs, always already, these determinations of a world are conceivable as metonymic ensembles within which, by virtue of the repression of difference, it is always possible to discern the repetition of a same. Here, I would suggest, further, that a ‘world’ thus determined admits consideration in terms of space *and* time. That is to say, among the possibilities enlivened in the assumption of a perspective on a world is the possibility that the world has a history. Let us relate this idea to what is implicit in one’s ‘decision to believe’ in the notion of ‘McCahon’s greatness’. In effect, one assumes a perspective on a world in relation to which, by virtue of the repression of difference, one has realised the possibility (or, better, perhaps, *one is as being given to realise the possibility*) of discerning, in the space and time of this world, the repetition of a same – in this case, the names ‘McCahon’, ‘McCahon’s art’, ‘McCahon’s visionary art’, ‘McCahon’s great art’, and so forth.

6.2 The figure of Hotere's reticence in Hotere discourse

6.2.1 McNamara

In the latter 1960s, McNamara's *New Zealand Herald* review articles: 'Intense Colour Enriches Absolute Abstracts' (1967), 'Beauty in Black his Theme, Show by Ralph Hotere' (1968), and 'Austerity Can Be Exquisite' (1969) (reviews, respectively, of the Barry Lett Galleries exhibitions *Zero, an exhibition of paintings*, *Black Paintings/68*, and *Ralph Hotere*) exemplify the contradictions proper to the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence'. Thus, in the first review piece, McNamara remarks on the 'single-minded severe purity' of paintings, confirming that 'Ralph Hotere is unique among New Zealand painters in this severity and austerity', and asserts that, in Hotere's work, 'expressionism, any form of personal drama are totally excluded'.⁵⁶⁰ In the second article, whilst noting the 'obvious debt to... Ad Reinhardt' in Hotere's earlier, *Zero* series paintings, McNamara praises the *Black Paintings* exhibition as a 'remarkable display' that 'shows Hotere's tremendous skill in manipulating a powerful visual idea of his own' and suggests that Hotere's 'show... proves that he can purge art of any personal idiosyncrasy even further... Any display of the artist's personality... is rigidly excluded'.⁵⁶¹ Finally, in the third exhibition summary, McNamara observes that 'in the best of these pictures Hotere's discipline has enabled him to make images of great clarity and precision' and that 'Hotere the man, the New Zealander, is concealed behind all this. His own personality is hidden but his pictures can be all things to all men'.⁵⁶²

On a superficial level, then, McNamara's articles affirm Hotere's eloquence insofar as Hotere's paintings testify to a unique capacity to *speak* of that which, hitherto, has been

⁵⁶⁰ McNamara, 'Intense Colour Enriches Absolute Abstracts', *New Zealand Herald*, 29 August 1967, section 1, 3.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid, 'Beauty in Black his Theme, Show by Ralph Hotere', *New Zealand Herald*, 20 August 1968, section 1, 2.

⁵⁶² Ibid, 'Austerity Can Be Exquisite', *New Zealand Herald*, 23 September 1969, section 1, 9.

unspoken. However, on a deeper level, McNamara's comments also demonstrate to what degree assertions of Hotere's eloquence testify to the contradictory simultaneity of eloquence and reticence proper to the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence'. This is evident from McNamara's suggestions that Hotere's paintings express his artistic personality *and* bear witness to a complete self-abnegation. Here, the implication is that Hotere 'speaks' *in the act of self-renunciation* and, in consequence, Hotere's work expresses a speaking that is, *at the same time*, a foreclosure of speech. To this extent, the eloquence of Hotere's paintings resides not only in their speaking of that which has been unspoken but also in their 'impossible' 'speaking the unspeakable' or 'eloquent speech'.

Furthermore, with varying degrees of emphasis, each of McNamara's review pieces observes that, in and of themselves, Hotere's paintings offer to be self-sufficiently entire, thereby rendering further elucidation in words superfluous or impossible. Although it is worth noting that McNamara's analyses do not accept the idea of the autonomy of the artwork without question, the contradictory simultaneity of reticence and eloquence proper to the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence' obtains insofar as Hotere's ostensible self-banishment from his paintings is considered to be synonymous with the creation of artworks that offer to be, entirely and sufficiently, their own explanation. That is to say, as noted in chapter five, in the very *making* of works that offer to be formally autonomous, it is necessary for Hotere to be *silenced*. Thus, in 'Intense Colour', McNamara proposes that Hotere's *Zero* series works constitute 'a quintessence of form' and 'a kind of minimal essence of painting', situating Hotere's sensibility 'close to the Eastern mind where the contemplation of vacuity of pure space and form is found satisfying in itself.'⁵⁶³ In 'Beauty in Black his Theme', McNamara remarks that Hotere's *Black Paintings* of 1968 are free of 'any literary sentiment' and, indeed, asks whether Hotere's 'minimal style of painting' is 'establishing what is absolutely basic to visual art or destroying valuable possibilities for communication'.⁵⁶⁴ Finally, in 'Austerity Can Be

⁵⁶³ Ibid, 'Intense Colour Enriches Absolute Abstracts'.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid, 'Beauty in Black his Theme'.

Exquisite', McNamara assesses Hotere's *Black Paintings* of 1969 as 'minimal art at its most extreme' – where, by virtue of

A logical process... Story telling, composition, brushwork, individual unreproducible qualities, any intervention of the medium between the viewer and the austerity of the painter's form has been rejected.

In consequence, McNamara asserts that the most successful of these paintings possess 'a quiet, calm beauty that defies analysis' and 'exist in their own right as objects of great beauty.'⁵⁶⁵

6.2.2 Collier

McNamara's qualified assessments of the impersonal, formally self-sufficient, and fundamentally enigmatic nature of Hotere's abstract paintings are reiterated, with greater force, in Collier's *Landfall* review of the Dawson's Gallery exhibition *Black Paintings 1970-Malady Series*. In support of his claim that Hotere's paintings transcend what may be expressed in words and, therefore, demand to be taken on purely formal, visual terms, Collier opens with a rebuttal of two 'literary' readings of Hotere's work. These comprise, firstly, the assertions of an unidentified speaker at the opening of Hotere's exhibition, who suggested that, like a 'Malay *kris*', Hotere's paintings 'must contain and manifest a soul' in relation to which one ought to '“be absorbed!”'. The second reading Collier addresses is, evidently, Esplin's *Otago Daily Times* review of Hotere's show, 'Black Art Of Ralph Hotere Is Stark Social Comment' (although, again, Collier does not identify Esplin by name). As a preliminary to their repudiation, Collier reproduces several of Esplin's observations:

...‘each painting stems from an internal mood’; Hotere was showing ‘his conviction of a world of sin, sickness, malaise and death and his vision of eventual harmony’; the exhibition might be ‘visual black power with a racist symbolism’,

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid, 'Austerity Can Be Exquisite'.

and was certainly 'intended to be didactic' and 'shrouded in ancient religious symbolism'.⁵⁶⁶

In Collier's view, these two readings 'constitute a list of what the paintings are not'.⁵⁶⁷ That is to say, the *Malady* paintings neither 'contain and manifest a soul', nor do they proceed from 'an internal mood'; the *Malady* paintings neither condemn the evils of the world nor do they proclaim Hotere's personal vision for its salvation; the *Malady* paintings neither present a lesson nor do they constitute an expression of religious mysticism.

To this extent, Collier echoes McNamara's suggestion that Hotere's abstract paintings expunge any expression of the artist's personality or narrative content. Rather than reading the *Malady* paintings as manifestations of the essential, inner self and feelings of the particular art subject called 'Hotere', Collier proposes, instead, that 'It may be more fruitful to talk about the pictures as things which one can see, than as texts from which one can derive overt messages'.⁵⁶⁸ To this extent, one finds a reiteration of the argument that the formal self-sufficiency of Hotere's paintings not only renders superfluous but, in fact, *demand*s the absence of any explicit expressions of Hotere's personality. The individual art subject called 'Hotere' *must be silenced* in order that, in and of itself, the work may speak. Hence, whilst allowing that the *Malady* paintings 'are shapings of Hotere's intuitions as an artist' (i.e., they testify to a kind of speaking), Collier insists that 'The principal thing about almost all the pictures is that nothing is overt, nothing is proclaimed' (i.e., the speaking they evince is muted, mediated, or *reticent*). Indeed, Collier goes so far as to suggest that any attempt to analyse the meaning of Hotere's work is inappropriate: 'The way a painting interacts with the spectator's power of sight is a complex business and best left so.'⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁶ Collier, 418. Collier cites Esplin, 'Black Art Of Ralph Hotere Is Stark Social Comment'.

⁵⁶⁷ Collier, 418.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid, 419.

6.2.3 Young, Middleditch

On initial inspection, Mark Young's effusive *Ascent* article, 'Love plus Zero/no Limit' (1969), presents a stark contrast to the assessments of McNamara and Collier that, in their acquiescence to the supremacy of pure form, Hotere's paintings offer to vanish the self and any other worldly reference. With reference to the political consciousness discernible in Hotere's *Sangro*, *Polaris*, and *Algérie* works of the early to mid 1960s (paintings that, respectively, allude to the Italian campaign of 1943 – which claimed the life of Hotere's brother, Jack – the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, and the activities of the Organisation de l'Armée Secrète towards the end of the Algerian War of Independence (1954-62)), Young proposes that these paintings are, precisely, eloquent expressions of the artist's personality and personal involvement in the human world:

Hotere is too human, too compassionate, too caring for his fellow men; is concerned with the things we prefer to ignore – such as the international crises... He is trying to teach us love, offering us a chance for our own betterment & self-discovery.⁵⁷⁰

In light of these precedents, Young rejects the idea that Hotere's slightly later and more abstract paintings (i.e., the *Zero* series and the *Black Paintings* of 1968) are 'Impersonal' or 'Negative'. On the contrary, Young characterises these works as 'positive act[s]... temper[ed] with love', by which Hotere is likened to a 'zen master... [who] has set the koan' – the unravelling of which is, simultaneously, a challenge and a gift. Indeed, Young's affirmation of Hotere's paintings as embodiments of Hotere's personality is underscored with the inclusion of a photograph of the artist's face reflected in the highly finished surface of one of the *Black Paintings*.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁷⁰ Young, 15-16. For a more comprehensive account of Hotere's paintings of the early 1960s, see Baker, *Ralph Hotere: the Vence paintings: Sangro, Polaris, Algérie* (MA thesis: University of Auckland, 2002).

⁵⁷¹ Young, 16, 17.

Insofar as Hotere's paintings are considered to be revelatory teachings inculcating a lesson of love and potential self-realisation, Young's essay affirms Hotere's eloquence in the sense of Hotere's unique capacity to *speak* of that which, hitherto, has been *unspoken*. However, a closer consideration of the parallel Young draws between Hotere's paintings and the koans set by a Zen master evinces the contradictions proper to the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence'. In effect, Young proposes that Hotere's work presents enigmas or paradoxes specifically intended to exhaust analysis on the level of consciousness and ego, thereby facilitating the more profoundly true or real experience of what Zen scholars such as Shin'ichi Hisamatsu and Daisetz Suzuki refer to as, respectively, the 'Formless Self' and, '*mushin no shin*' or 'no-mind-ness'.⁵⁷² To this extent, Young's commentary implies, firstly, that, within the frame of conscious experience, Hotere's paintings clearly articulate humanistic concerns *and* speak in riddles (i.e., there is, simultaneously, clear, unmediated speaking *and* unclear, mediated speaking; eloquence *and* reticence). Secondly, it is precisely the enigmatic dimension of Hotere's work (i.e., that which, from the perspective of consciousness is a 'not-speaking clearly') that facilitates an experience of the true and real speaking of the Formless Self

⁵⁷² For a reference to the notion of the 'Formless Self' see Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, *Zen and the Fine Arts*, trans Gishin Tokiwa (New York: Kodansha International Ltd., 1982 (1971), originally published as *Zen to Bijutsu* (Kyoto: Bokubi Sha, 1958), 18-19. Here, Hisamatsu suggests that the 'Formless Self, or the True Self, as it is called in Zen' is that which exceeds and eludes distinctions between subject and object, the 'ordinary self-with-form' and the 'self-without-form'. Whilst Hisamatsu does not explicitly define the 'Formless Self' in terms of a subjectivity that is unconscious, this characterisation of no-mind-ness is prominent in Suzuki's writing. See, for example, Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959, originally published as *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture* (Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society, 1938)), 110, where Suzuki states:

The conscious mind is *ushin no shin* contrasting with *mushin no shin*, mind unconscious of itself. *Mushin* literally means "no-mind," it is the mind negating itself, letting go itself from itself...

See also, *ibid*, *Essays in Zen Buddhism, Third Series* (London: Rider and Company, 1973 (1953), originally published London: Luzac, 1934), where it is asserted that 'the Buddhist teaching of Non-ego' is 'the practical method of expounding the philosophy of the Unconscious' (361) and, furthermore, that

To the Japanese mind, 'Muga' and 'Mushin' signify the same thing. When one attains the state of 'Muga', the state of 'Mushin', the Unconscious, is realized. 'Muga' is something identified with a state of ecstasy in which there is no sense of 'I am doing it'. (362)

or no-mind-ness (i.e., from the perspective of psychoanalysis, a speaking that is unconscious). From this second perspective, Hotere's paintings are, again, conceived as enacting a logically impossible simultaneity of not speaking (consciously) *and* speaking (unconsciously); reticence *and* eloquence.

The contradictory positing of Hotere-as-eloquent and Hotere-as-reticent also flavours John Middleditch's *Otago Daily Times* article 'Powerful Hotere Paintings Compel Viewers' Attention' (1972) (a response to the Dawson's Gallery exhibition *Hotere: Sangro Panels 1962 and 1964, Port Chalmers Paintings 1972*).⁵⁷³ In the former case, Middleditch echoes Young's interpretation of the *Sangro* paintings as, first and foremost, direct expressions of Hotere's personality and personal politics. Thus, Middleditch locates the genesis and meaning of the *Sangro* series in Hotere's visit, in 1962, to his brother's resting place in the New Zealand Servicemen's Cemetery, located in the Sangro River area. Indeed, in Middleditch's view, this personal connection 'probably brought out the best in... [Hotere's] painting, for these are among his greatest works' and, still further, 'among the most powerful and compelling works we are likely to see in New Zealand.'⁵⁷⁴ Moreover, by way of highlighting Hotere's anti-war sentiments, Middleditch paraphrases Young's observation that the *Sangro* paintings are ' "an expression of utter futility and wasteful destruction of the lives of young men in war." '⁵⁷⁵

Compared with the expressionistic *Sangro* paintings (in which central, rectangular regions of brightly coloured, freely applied brushwork present striking contrasts with surrounding, black-painted frames – often emblazoned with letter and numbers, stencilled and applied freehand), Middleditch asserts of the *Port Chalmers* paintings that:

⁵⁷³ Representative *Sangro* series paintings include *Sangro Panel* (1962-63, ref. 92) and *Winter Landscape, Sangro River, Italy* (1963, ref. 93), whilst the *Port Chalmers* paintings include the aforementioned *Port Chalmers Painting No. 10*, *Port Chalmers Painting No. 14* (1972, ref. 94) and *Port Chalmers Painting No. 16* (1972, ref. 95).

⁵⁷⁴ John Middleditch, 'Powerful Hotere Paintings Compel Viewers' Attention', *Otago Daily Times*, 12 December 1972, 14.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. Middleditch cites Young, 16.

Instead of coming out to the viewer they are shy and retiring, and you must go after them. These cannot be skimmed over in one visit to the gallery, but must be studied.

Still further, in comparison with the outspoken, immediacy of expression of the *Sangro* paintings, Middleditch suggests that the *Port Chalmers* paintings are muted almost to the point of being indiscernible:

Until your eyes become used to the light you will not see the subtle changes from greys to blacks, from warm grey to cold grey. Sometimes the square or circular motif is marked only by a change in texture, and little or no change in colour or tone.

Nevertheless, Middleditch's commentary also implies that this surface silence masks a subterranean speaking:

There seems to be something aggressive in this series, something that says "Keep out." I suppose outsiders will never quite get under the surface, and the artist seems reluctant to help us.⁵⁷⁶

To the extent that Middleditch presents the *Port Chalmers* paintings as *actively* resistant to analysis, it is as if, paradoxically, they clearly speak *that* they are unspeakable (or, perhaps, not to be spoken). Having posed this aesthetic challenge, however, Middleditch immediately leavens it with a compensatory gesture of normalisation. This is evident from his characterisation of Hotere as 'a shy, retiring man who gets great pleasure from the simple things of life. If you see him, you will probably find him like any other Kiwi – in a pub.'⁵⁷⁷ Here, it is evident that, in doubling the reference to being 'shy and retiring', Middleditch offers to vanish distinctions between Hotere and his work. In this way, the seeming reticence of the *Port Chalmers* paintings can be reconciled with the apparent verbosity of the *Sangro* works insofar as both series are understood to be direct

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

expressions of Hotere's personality. In effect, this is, again, to *trans-mute* the silence of the *Port Chalmers* paintings into speech – where, moreover, the potentially alienating incomprehensibility of this silent speech is ameliorated by Middleditch's reassuring presentation of Hotere as a modest and regular, 'Kiwi' bloke.

6.2.4 Hall

The contradictions proper to the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence' are reiterated in one of the most significant contributions to Hotere discourse published in the 1970s: Garth Hall's untitled, unpaginated essay in *Waikato Art Gallery Bulletin 4, Ralph Hotere* (1973).⁵⁷⁸ In common with the likes of Young and Middleditch (both of whom Hall references), Hall acknowledges Hotere's engagement with contemporary politics – briefly outlining the significance of the *Polaris*, *Algérie*, and *Human Rights* paintings, as well as a Watergate-inspired series of xerox images of Richard Nixon. To this extent, Hall's opening comments are in harmony with the idea that Hotere speaks directly and openly in his work. Subsequently, however, Hall's discussion places special emphasis on Hotere's silence – albeit, an emphasis that is, paradoxically, sustained by continual appeals to Hotere's speaking. This contradictory counterpoise of speaking and not-speaking is evident, for example, in Hall's presentation of the *Zero* paintings as defining a 'stage' in a progression from Hotere's speaking (e.g., in the politically engaged works of the early to mid 1960s) to Hotere's silence (e.g., in the more minimal works of the latter 1960s and early 1970s). Indeed, it may be apparent that this posited progression from speech to silence is, at the same time, the positing of a progression from works engaged with and reflecting on the world to works that offer to be worlds unto

⁵⁷⁸ Garth Hall, untitled essay in *Waikato Art Gallery Bulletin 4, Ralph Hotere* (Hamilton: Waikato Art Gallery, 1973), np. This publication is significant for being the first overview of Hotere's work sponsored by a public arts institution in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Whilst not an exhibition catalogue proper, on the last page of this publication it is stated:

The Waikato Art Gallery Bulletin No.4 was produced as a comment on the work of Ralph Hotere. Publication of the Bulletin coincides with the artist's exhibition at the Waikato Art Gallery and completion of the Hamilton Founders Theatre Mural, August, 1973

The exhibition referred to is *Ralph Hotere 1970-73* (1973).

themselves – i.e., works that are formally autonomous and which, therefore, not only offer to fill but, in fact, demand, Hotere's silence.

Thus, alluding to Hotere's artist statement in the catalogue accompanying *Zero, an exhibition of paintings*, Hall remarks that 'At this stage... [Hotere] still commented on the purpose of his painting' and, by way of substantiating the inference that the *Zero* paintings mark a 'stage' in a progression from speech to silence, reproduces Hotere's comment that '“I was still at a stage... where I was giving names to my paintings.”' Hall then asserts that

Even the sequence of some of the titles... [in the *Zero* catalogue]: 'Zero Beginning' 'Zero is White' 'Zero is Round' 'Zero Flowing' 'Zero is Silence' 'Zero Silent' – implied Hotere's attitude from then on. He spoke less about his work, relying more and more on the paintings to express.⁵⁷⁹

Here, it should be noted that, in the first place, Hall does *not* reproduce the sequence of titles in the order they appear in the *Zero* catalogue. The first two works are '1. ZERO IS SILENCE' and '2. ZERO BEGINNING', whilst the final pair of paintings are '16. ZERO SILENT' and '17. ZERO IS ZERO'. Hence, whilst the *Zero* catalogue twice associates 'zero' and 'silence', there is, in the numerical sequencing of the works, no evident *progression* towards silence. Rather, there is an opening identification of 'zero' and 'silence', and a closing identification of 'zero' with itself. That is to say, Hotere's titles propose 'zero' as the sign of that which is 'silent' insofar as it is, entirely and sufficiently, 'itself' and, therefore, that in relation to which nothing else remains to be spoken.⁵⁸⁰

Secondly, it is evident that, insofar as it contains a considerable number of direct quotes and paraphrases in which Hotere discusses his work, Hall's essay, itself, directly

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ In Hotere, *Zero, an exhibition of paintings*, works are listed as follows: '1. ZERO IS SILENCE, 2. ZERO BEGINNING, 3. ZERO IS ROUND, 4. ZERO FLOWING, 5. THE SUN ZERO, 6. ZERO IS WHITE, 7. 3 2 1 ZERO, 8. RED, 9. ORANGE, 10. YELLOW, 11. GREEN, 12. BLUE, 13. INDIGO, 14. VIOLET, 15. THE NIGHT ZERO, 16. ZERO SILENT, 17. ZERO IS ZERO'.

contradicts the idea that Hotere has become progressively reticent. For example, Hall reproduces or alludes to Hotere's comments on (1) the benefits of working in Dunedin as opposed to Auckland: ' "In Dunedin," he noted, "they accept that I'm a painter and leave me to go about my work. In Auckland it's not like that." ' ; (2) Hotere's dissatisfaction with the *Te Whiti* series of 1972: 'But it is a series about which the artist is unhappy. At least, he says, if he did the "Te Whiti" series again he'd do something quite different.' ; (3) the formal and expressive significance of the circle motif in the context of the (then, recently completed) *Founders Memorial Theatre Mural* (1973, ref. 96) in Hamilton: 'He sees murals as "a means of art that wouldn't get across with a painting." "Who would buy one of those for their house?" he asked, referring to one of the mural panels for Hamilton. "That circle is a complete statement. I tried to do that eighteen months ago but couldn't."... "Each circle," Hotere remarked, "loses some of that impact when it goes up as part of the mural." ' ; (4) the idea that the visual takes priority over the verbal: ' "It's unfair to expect an artist to be articulate. It's a visual thing, not verbal." ' ; (5) the idea that the making of the painting is, already, a sufficient statement: ' "When you show a painting you bare your soul, you don't want to bloody well sell your soul as well." ' ; (6) the shortcomings of certain types of art criticism: 'He is irritated by comment which is "comparative", not capable of seeing anything in its own right. As with the "minimalist" label, Hotere feels "they want to put you in little pigeon holes." ' ; (7) the desirability of the *Waikato Art Gallery Bulletin* piece being purely pictorial: 'Recalling one conversation with Hotere at Port Chalmers earlier this year, when the subject of a Bulletin about him came up, he simply said: "If you have to do something on me, fill it with photos of my work. They say all that really needs to be said." ' ⁵⁸¹

In keeping with the resistance this project presents to the traditionalising mode of art history and art criticism, wherein there may be a tendency to identify originating gestures too swiftly and absolutely, one ought to exercise caution in regarding Hotere's testimony as a series of grounding assertions, establishing the tenor and direction of subsequent discourse. Nevertheless, it is evident that some of Hotere's statements exemplify features characteristic of the figure of Hotere's reticence in Hotere discourse – namely, the

⁵⁸¹ Hotere quoted and paraphrased in Hall.

reification of the right of the artist to be silent, the insistence that, always already, the artwork is the repository of a full speaking, the suggestion that, insofar as it is preoccupied with expressing preconceived ideas, art commentary fails to ‘see’ the artwork as it really is. In each of these assertions, there is a valourisation of the visual experience of the artwork as primary, genuine, real and a denigration of verbal (spoken or written) interpretation of this visual experience as secondary, distorted, fabrication.⁵⁸² However, it may be observed that this privileging is tenable only on the condition that the artwork (or the artist-creator) *is* primary, first, origin, source. If one entertains the idea that artists and artworks are expressions of a subjectivity defined in terms of a tension between self and Other, individual and transindividual then, always already, the art subject and the art object are, themselves, expressions of reading and interpretation – albeit, reading and interpretation taking place in a language that may tend to emphasise the visual over the verbal.

Whilst this is not a matter that admits any final resolution, if, indeed, Hotere’s *verbal* testimony, as presented in Hall’s essay, resounds through Hotere discourse with the force of a command then a profound irony flavours the subsequent perpetuation of the *point de capiton* ‘Hotere’s reticence’. In this event, the repeated positing of Hotere-as-reticent would be, in the ‘first’ instance, secured on the basis of Hotere’s *speaking* and, to this extent, would, thereby, expose the degree to which Hotere discourse fixates on the individual art subject called ‘Hotere’. Regardless of the priority this interpretation of ‘Hotere’s reticence’ may be accorded, it is striking that, in reading Hall’s account, one gains the impression that, far from being taciturn or uncommunicative, Hotere speaks *incessantly*. Indeed, the sense that Hotere *continuously* speaks also colours Hall’s assessment of Hotere’s personality. Consider, for example, Hall’s observation that

⁵⁸² At first glance, this position would seem to be incommensurable with the incorporation of textual elements in Hotere’s paintings. However, I would suggest that these cases are subject to a number of ameliorating factors. Firstly, Hotere selects the textual elements in question. Secondly, textual elements placed in painting become visual elements, thereby demonstrating the artificiality of distinctions between writing and painting, graphic and plastic. Thirdly, the presence of the textual in Hotere’s paintings bears witness to a conversation between visual and verbal – a complementary *speaking with* each other. This contrasts with art commentary or art criticism, where the drive towards exegesis tends to result in a *speaking to* or a *speaking for* the artwork. In either case, there is a speaking *in lieu of* or *in the place of* the artwork.

Ralph Hotere is an extremely intense individual, almost to the point of appearing furtive. He expresses himself in short bursts of conversation surrounded by long silences...

Here, it is worth noting that Hall almost immediately qualifies this observation, suggesting that, on reflection (or, rather, I would suggest, as *rationalisation*), the precarious – indeed, almost perilous – encounter with Hotere-the-artist-enigma is, somehow, transformed into a reassuring revelation of essences of meaning:

Gradually, one realises the value of the silence; the brooding nature heightens, rather than strains, conversation... Rather than inarticulation abbreviated speech expresses the essentials. No leading in. No prior justification. Hotere gives the essence of his thoughts in a few words.⁵⁸³

One might suggest that, for Hall, Hotere's silence is akin to the continuous emanation of a repulsive field of force, the insistence and intensity of which increases the more closely one approaches an explanation (or speaking) of Hotere-the-person or Hotere's work. The 'short bursts of conversation surrounded by long silences' are like the intermittent breakdowns of a powerfully oppressive field potential. From this standpoint, Hall's impression that Hotere's 'intense', 'furtive', brooding' silence 'heightens, rather than strains, conversation' would seem to exemplify the manner by which the figure of Hotere's reticence in Hotere discourse bears witness to a paradoxical not speaking that is a speaking. That is to say, the manner by which, in consciousness, reticence functions as a principle of mediation, bearing witness, thereby, to the 'unconscious speaking' that is, always already, taking place.

6.2.5 Leech

The manner by which the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence' bears witness to the constancy or insistence of a paradoxical not speaking that is a speaking also is evident in

⁵⁸³ Hall.

Peter Leech's *Art New Zealand* piece: 'Style and Change, Ralph Hotere' – a response to Hotere's *Paintings 1983* show at the Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, in which (as Leech observes) eight of the sixteen works exhibited employed stainless steel – for example: *Black Window* (1983, ref. 97) and *Baby Iron* (1983, ref. 98).⁵⁸⁴ The basic impetus of Leech's discussion is evident from his suggestions that, in the Bosshard Galleries show, 'Hotere has introduced an occasion for a deepening consideration of what his style *is* and has been' and that, furthermore, 'the exhibition offers, I think, an authentic scaffolding for a Hotere style-delineation.' That is to say, Leech's primary concern is the elaboration of the truth or essence of Hotere's style – where *Paintings 1983* provides the framework within which the possibility of articulating this truth or essence is enlivened. Leech embarks on this objective by making an instrumental distinction between 'signature' and 'style'. The former is defined as 'mere visual recognisability' whilst the latter is defined as 'a univocal language for the working out and through of successive artistic concerns'. Furthermore, Leech insists that 'style... *permits* change; signature does not' and, on this basis, he repudiates the suggestion that Hotere's works 'incorporating... a new and seductive element of highly-polished stainless steel sheets' bear witness to the artist's adoption of 'a different, more inviting style'. On the contrary, Leech insists that the works exhibited in *Paintings 1983* 'constitute perseverations of the artist's style, rather than innovations'.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸⁴ Leech, 'Style and Change'. As Leech points out, two works in *Paintings 1983* utilising stainless steel were titled *Black Window*. It would appear that the *Black Window* illustrated in Leech's article, which employs corrugated steel, is different from that which Leech addresses in his text. Thus Leech refers to the 'traumatised... glossy glamour of the stainless steel... hammered down into the painting with crude leadhead nails' and the 'strip... torn from the side and made to curl over on itself.'

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid. Whilst Leech does not identify any other commentators by name, his *Art New Zealand* piece bears comparison with Bridie Lonie's review article 'Hotere: new directions', *Otago Daily Times*, 3 October 1983, 22. Here, it is evident that, its title notwithstanding, Lonie also emphasises the 'clear continuity in Hotere's work' and, indeed, observes that the new works on stainless steel bestow a 'different emphasis' on an established theme – namely, 'the use of buffing on polished surface'. As Lonie points out, the difference in question reflects the nature of the surface subject to buffing: buffing a polished, painted surface brings light into the work; buffing a polished, stainless steel surface introduces 'figures which stand in grey shadow on the cold polished steel.'

From the perspective of psychoanalysis, Leech's signature/style distinction illustrates, precisely, the paradoxical not speaking that is a speaking proper to the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence'. It may be noted that *signature*, as 'mere visual recognisability', defines that which is identified clearly and immediately. *Style*, by contrast, as that which invites 'deepening consideration', is proper to determinations that lack clarity (i.e., evince ambiguity) or that obtain as mediated. In other words, the seeming clarity and immediacy by which one affirms the identity of signature would seem to exemplify the idealisations and rationalisations of consciousness. The insufficiencies of these determinations testify to the status of the 'speaking of signature' as a partial, ambiguous, and mediated expression of what, on the level of the unconscious, would be the fuller, truer 'speaking of style'. To put the matter in equivalent terms, one might suggest that, insofar as the speaking of signature tends to prohibit change in its reification of the same, it harmonises with the metonymic function: namely, that which is implicated in 'resistance of signification' and thus re-playing of existing meaning. By contrast, insofar as it bears witness to the emergence of difference and, thereby, '*permits* change', the speaking of style resonates with the metaphoric function implicated in 'emergence of signification'.⁵⁸⁶ From this standpoint, always already it is the case that the (conscious) speaking of signature *is as* reiterated (even if this amounts to nothing more than the radical contingency of repeating the name 'Hotere') and *is as* fading in the face of the insistence of the (unconscious) speaking of style.

The manner by which, in consciousness, reticent not speaking functions as a principle of mediation, bearing witness to the insistence of a speaking that is unconscious, also follows from Leech's elaboration of the 'two crucial aspects of Hotere's style' in terms of a *mediating tension*. In relation to the first detail, this is evident from Leech's reference to the

⁵⁸⁶ Thus, in Lacanian terms, the speaking of style is synonymous with the real-as-impossible, metaphoric function of pure difference defining the 'essence' of the signifier and/or the operation of the unary trait. From this standpoint, 'style' fundamentally resists determination as a metaphysical entity or expression of such. Hence, in common with attempts to absolutely determine the signs 'the *Malady* series' or 'McCahon's authority', Leech's proposed 'Hotere style-delineation' concerns itself with the realisation of an impossible object and, to this extent, exemplifies the status of art history or art criticism as discourses of desire (i.e., symptoms of the desire that, paradoxically, finds fulfilment in endlessly missing its aim).

...peculiar tenseness of Hotere's formalism: the sense, in so many paintings over the years, that formal elements are employed not so much for formal ends but rather to clamp and artificially to hold down turbulent undercurrents.⁵⁸⁷

Leech contends that this 'holding down of turbulent undercurrents' – the reticent mediation of what might, otherwise, burgeon into an unbridled expressionism – is, itself, achieved in a twofold way. Firstly, Leech alludes to the manner by which 'the stainless steel sheets act... rather like high-tensile skins'. Here, the implication is that there is a containment of and, indeed, a pulling into a taut, rigid, and impenetrable flatness of anything in the works that might speak out. Secondly, Leech maintains that, insofar as many of the works in question incorporate recycled, 'rough-cut', wooden, window frames, 'The seductive glamour of the steel is immediately overpowered by this literally clamping convention.' In so prioritising the 'holding down', 'overpowering', and 'clamping' of any overt expressionism in Hotere's work, Leech signals his investment in the notion of formal autonomy. Indeed, this is made explicit in Leech's closing comments where, acknowledging 'Hotere's notorious distaste for discussing his own work', Leech concludes: 'The work of course speaks for itself; and in this exhibition it speaks very clearly in Hotere's style.'⁵⁸⁸ In taking this position, Leech's article echoes writing by McNamara and Collier insofar as the appeal to formal autonomy is sustained *on the condition that* Hotere's 'artist-self' is *silenced* or *contained* in the work. In this way, Leech's commentary reiterates two features proper to the figure of Hotere's reticence in Hotere discourse – namely, that (1) Hotere 'speaks' *in the act of self-renunciation* and that, furthermore, (2) the appeal to formal autonomy is not merely *compensation for* but, in fact, *demanding of* the artist's silence.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁷ Leech, 'Style and Change'.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ By way of amplifying this point, recall that, in chapter five, it was suggested that the realisation of a formally autonomous artwork is an impossibility insofar as a work of this kind would be that which is (or speaks, is spoken) entirely and self-sufficiently. Insofar as the formally autonomous artwork is that in relation to which, so to speak, *nothing remains to be said*, it is that which resists analysis and explanation. Hence, the actual creation of a formally autonomous artwork defines a contradiction. It is, in effect, a speaking of that which is unspeakable. In the

The contradictions inherent in his appeal to formal autonomy are also evident in Leech's assessment of the second crucial characteristic of Hotere's style – namely, 'subtle stresses of lighting effect'. By way of elaborating the 'stresses' in question, Leech refers to the 'shimmer' in Hotere's *Window in Spain* series of the late 1970s and the 'textured corruscations' of the *Aramoana* paintings of the early 1980s. Whilst Leech does not qualify these allusions in greater detail, one may understand them with reference to paintings such as *Window In Spain* (1978, ref. 99) and the ten-piece, corrugated iron work *Aramoana* (1982, ref. 100). In the former picture, Hotere creates a broad, cruciform shape from a dense patterning of white-on-white, blobbed and speckled pigment. In the latter work, fine speckling, in white and rust-red paint, is augmented with stringy splashes and rivulets of white pigment. In either case, 'stresses of lighting effect' would seem to deny any significant recession into illusory depth, thereby reifying the autonomy and integrity of the painted surface. However, in comparison with these earlier works, Leech finds fault with some of the Bosshard Galleries stainless steel pieces for the 'seductive... irrelevance' of their 'mirror effect', which 'produces an illusory depth' and 'evanescence' Leech finds 'troublingly at odds with Hotere's customary muscularity and robustness.' Moreover, by virtue of this mirroring, Leech maintains that the stainless steel works 'acquire too facile a glamour and tend, in that respect, to promote the belief that Hotere has moved to a different and more inviting style.'⁵⁹⁰

In other words, Leech criticises certain works for what might be termed their facile loquaciousness – for speaking out, as it were, too swiftly and too superficially, for

appeal to formal autonomy, then, one expresses a desire to realise an impossibility – one speaks the necessity to speak. Insofar as this appeal is destined to fail, the impossible speaking the unspeakable involved in the creation of the formally autonomous artwork *will be reticent*. That is to say, appealing to formal autonomy necessitates insisting on a paradoxical 'not speaking' (on the level of consciousness) that is a 'speaking' (on the level of the unconscious). Equivalently, one may say that asserting the formal autonomy of Hotere's work demands Hotere's silence. The presence of these contradictions demonstrates that the assertion of formal autonomy is an imagining of the imaginary – an imaginary surrogate posited in an effort to realise *objet petit a* – in this case, synonymous with the impossible 'speaking the unspeakable' proper to the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence'.

⁵⁹⁰ Leech, 'Style and Change'.

substituting glamour, evanescence, and illusion for sobriety, plainness, constancy, sturdiness, reality, and truth. Those works that invite Leech's approval are considered to mitigate this overt and alluring speaking out (one might say, in Leech's parlance, a *signature speech*) with what is, in effect, a more mediated, reticent speaking (or, perhaps, a *speaking of style*). Thus, *Black Window* attracts Leech's approbation for the manner by which 'the glossy glamour of the steel sheet has been traumatised... hammered down into the painting with crude leadhead nails... a strip torn from the side and made to curl over on itself.' In consequence, 'Toughness and tenseness is restored; the seductive mirroring is dismissed.' In Leech's opinion *Baby Iron* achieves a similar result through its employment of corrugated steel: 'What this... achieves is a reflectivity and shimmer folded in on itself: the play of light across the surface is more subtly contained and independent', thereby preserving 'the sense of closed-upness and tautness which is so characteristic of Hotere's art.'⁵⁹¹ Here, Leech's formalist stance emerges insofar as he praises those works that tend to draw attention to the physical reality of the materials employed in their fabrication or the degree to which the manipulation of formal elements results in a sense of 'containment', 'independence', and 'closed-upness'. At the same time, however, Leech invests in the hand/mind of Hotere-as-artist/creator in suggesting that the 'toughness', 'tension', and 'tautness' of *Black Window* and *Baby Iron* results from 'turbulent undercurrents' being '*artificially held down*' (my italics). In accordance with the paradoxes proper to the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence', Hotere's work is praised to the extent that, paradoxically, it exhibits formal self-sufficiency *and* evidence of artistic creativity (albeit, an agency or speaking that *must be reticent*).

6.2.6 Wedde

In the 1980s and 1990s, one encounters explicit references to Hotere's 'reticence' in at least two pieces by Wedde – one of Hotere's longstanding supporters and artistic collaborators. The first of these is the *Evening Post* review article 'Hotere stunning' (1985) – a response to the Janne Land Gallery show *...and death wears the colours of a peacock*, in which Hotere displayed some of his vividly colourful and expressionistic

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

works protesting French, nuclear weapons testing on Mururoa atoll. The second example is ‘Where is the art that does this?’ – Wedde’s introduction to O’Brien’s *Hotere, Out The Black Window* (1997). Here, it may be noted that the *Evening Post* piece prioritises the surpassing or superseding of Hotere’s formal restraint whilst, in the introduction to O’Brien’s book, there is a reinvestment in the notion of Hotere’s silence – albeit, as that which is efficacious in promoting the speaking of others. Whilst, ostensibly, these two perspectives seem irreconcilable, it is apparent that, in both cases, and in accordance with the paradoxical form and functioning of the *point de capiton* ‘Hotere’s reticence’, Wedde appeals to the idea that there is a ‘not speaking’ which is a ‘speaking’ on behalf of the particular art subject called ‘Hotere’. On the one hand, then, Wedde deserves credit for astutely subverting the rhetoric of silence surrounding Hotere and his work. On the other hand, however, and notwithstanding the acuity and sensitivity of his arguments, it remains the case that Wedde privileges Hotere-the-artist-individual as the exemplary point of reference enabling and grounding the meaning of Hotere’s work.

Thus, in ‘Hotere stunning’, Wedde opens with the observation that ‘Ralph Hotere’s show at Janne Land’s will shock those accustomed to his reticent lyricism.’ That is to say, in Wedde’s view, prior to the exhibition in question, Hotere’s work has been conceivable in terms of a paradoxical not speaking that is a speaking – a singing that, whilst not absolutely silent is, at least, subject to reticence as a principle of mediation. However, the *Mururoa* paintings deviate from this paradigm insofar as they present ‘more colour than we’ve ever seen from Hotere, and more sense of an expressive link between the artist and the marks on the canvas: a greater sense of personal urgency.’ In other words, Wedde suggests that, to a degree unprecedented, the *Mururoa* paintings testify to Hotere’s speaking, immediately and fully, in or through his work. Indeed, whilst allowing that ‘The sense of frustration and rage in these works doesn’t, of course, need to have a personal line-in to Ralph Hotere himself’, nevertheless, to a significant degree, Wedde presents the *Mururoa* works as Hotere’s personal riposte to those critics (e.g., Leech – although Wedde demurs from making any positive identification) who ‘lately’, have been

uneasy about the elegant, decorative, beautiful features of his work... This beauty they find incongruous in art whose chief qualities are reticence, austerity, and a deeply embedded political commitment.

Wedde continues:

As though in response to this line of criticism, Hotere, in a furious burst of activity, has produced works that could be described as flagrantly, aggressively beautiful...

It seems to me that Hotere is also, with some irritation, offering the critics a chance to take a colder bath than the luke-warm one they've offered him.⁵⁹²

It may be noted that, regardless of whether it is restrained or expressive, 'reticent' or 'eloquent', Wedde's account proposes 'lyricism' as a defining feature of Hotere's work. Here, one may observe a certain irony: to the extent that it articulates a qualitative constant for Hotere's style, Wedde's article mirrors that of Leech – even if, in contrast with Leech's favouring of a 'clamping down' of 'turbulent undercurrents' (i.e., an impetus to silence and self-containment), Wedde advocates their unimpeded outflow (i.e., an impetus to open and effusive self-expression).

Whilst his *Evening Post* review article would appear to celebrate the outspoken and expressionistic aspects of Hotere's work, a decade later, Wedde's 'Where is the art that does this?' seems to conduct an about-turn in presenting a twofold reinvestment in the notion of Hotere's 'reticent lyricism'. This is evident, firstly, in the suggestion that 'Despite their frequent darkness, there's often a sense of illumination behind Ralph Hotere's paintings' – even if, in some cases, 'paradoxically, the light is dark (the "black windows")'.⁵⁹³ That is to say, *behind* or *of* that which would appear to stifle any expression of subjectivity/meaning-making (i.e., 'darkness'), something is, nevertheless, apprehended or disclosed. Thus, the contradiction Wedde finds proper to Hotere's

⁵⁹² Wedde, 'Hotere stunning'. Exemplifying the works to which Wedde refers is a painting that, in French, bears the title of the exhibition in question: *La Mort a les Couleurs du Paon* (1985, ref. 101). Here, against a rectangular field of brilliant orange, Hotere deploys another of his characteristic emblems – a bisected heart and crucifix.

⁵⁹³ Wedde, 'Where is the art that does this?' in O'Brien, *Hotere, Out The Black Window*, 8-9.

paintings (at least, those works employing black that, to be fair, do constitute a significant subset of Hotere's *oeuvre*) resides in their status as illuminating darkneses or darkneses that illuminate – in the quality of this illumination as a 'light... [that] is dark'. In aural terms, this might be characterised as a *speaking that is silent*.⁵⁹⁴ Secondly, and specifically alluding to Hotere's work with New Zealand poets (of whom Wedde is one), Wedde presents a tacit apology for Hotere's reticence on the basis that it is

...a way of leaving space in which the words of others can be heard... a taciturnity which is a homage to the speech or writing of others... A silence not sullen or inarticulate, but respectful...⁵⁹⁵

In consequence, Wedde concludes:

The silence of Ralph Hotere's art is like the silence of a host whose guests are poets. The excess of the art is like generous hospitality. The collaborations in the art are like a love of conversation.⁵⁹⁶

Here, the implication is that Hotere's silence reflects selflessness or even self-abnegation in the name of inviting collaboration and conversation. At the same time, however, Hotere's self-effacement or self-silencing also is an eloquent 'not speaking' that is a 'speaking' insofar as it is an essential, structuring component of a 'conversation' in which the speech of others is promoted with particular skill and efficacy. To the extent that Wedde celebrates Hotere's self-vanishing as the virtuoso performance of a 'generous... host', his introductory piece, in *Hotere, Out The Black Window*, harmonises, precisely, with the primary impetus of 'Hotere stunning' – namely, the privileging of the individual art subject called 'Hotere'.

⁵⁹⁴ The idea that Hotere's work illuminates with a 'light... [that] is dark' is further reiterated in Wedde, 'Introduction' in *Ralph Hotere: Black Light*, viii. Here, Wedde reaffirms that 'Paradox is at the heart of Ralph Hotere's practice. The art's silence is full of meanings, its darkness is, persistently, a kind of illumination.'

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid, 'Where is the art that does this?', 9.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid, 11.

6.2.7 Pound

Whilst this by no means exhausts the field of possibilities, as a final illustration of the figure of Hotere's reticence in Hotere discourse, one may consider Pound's contribution to the suite of texts presented in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Ralph Hotere: Black Light: 'Tiger Country: Hotere, Reinhardt and the US Masters'*. Proceeding on the basis of Hotere's annotation of the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Ad Reinhardt* (1991), Pound's essay invokes Reinhardt's writing in order to analyse Hotere's *Black Paintings* of the late 1960s – with special attention being devoted to the so-called 'early black paintings' of 1968.⁵⁹⁷ Here, it is noteworthy that, in common with Wedde, Pound rejects the simplistic notion that Hotere and/or his work are silent. It is the case that, given the 'inextricably literary... New Zealand context' of the late 1960s, in which 'poets were canonisers, critics, sharers and co-providers of content', Pound considers Hotere's *Black Paintings* to be striking for what they 'exclude and negate' – namely, words, poetry, narratives. Still further, Pound also acknowledges that in 'refusing – or seeming to refuse – speech' the *Black Paintings* reflect the manner by which

If Hotere puts no words *in* the paintings, and no *illustrations* of words, nor does he put words *around* them. This exemplary and much mythologised refusal to frame the work in words (artist's statements, interviews, etc.) is akin to the refusal of the works themselves to offer any easy speech.

However, Pound also recognises that

⁵⁹⁷ In Francis Pound, 'Tiger Country, Hotere, Reinhardt and the US Masters' in Dunedin Public Art Gallery and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongawera, *Ralph Hotere: Black Light, Major works including collaborations with Bill Culbert*, exh. cat. (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2000), 15, the 'early black paintings' of 1968 are characterised as three septets in which cruciforms, finely rendered in the colours of the spectrum, are disposed on highly reflective black grounds. The first group comprises seven smaller works on glass currently held by the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongawera, Wellington (ref. 102). A second group of large works on board is 'now scattered in various hands' and a third septet of works on board, of a size in between the first two groups, is currently held by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth (ref. 103).

Yet, clearly, both silences can be read as a positivity: to refuse speech *is* a speech: the statement of a refusal, a negation which silently resounds.⁵⁹⁸

Pound's observation may be fruitfully compared with that made by Susan Sontag, in 'The Aesthetics of Silence' (1967). Here, Sontag suggests that ' "Silence" never ceases to imply its opposite and to depend on its presence' and, furthermore, that

A genuine emptiness, a pure silence, are not feasible – either conceptually or in fact. If only because the artwork exists in a world furnished with many other things, the artist who creates silence or emptiness must produce something dialectical: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence. Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech... and an element in a dialogue.⁵⁹⁹

Combining these statements, one may suggest that the manner by which Hotere's *Black Paintings* seemingly refuse to 'offer any easy speech' does not imply an absolute absence of speech but rather testifies to a speaking that is difficult or enigmatic. Similarly, always already, Hotere's refusal to offer explanations of his work is, *qua* refusal, a 'statement', an 'element in a dialogue.' Repudiating words, then, is not repudiating speech; being wordless is not being silent. Indeed, the repudiation in question invites interpretation as a 'speaking out' in the form of a demand or a challenge that (as stated in the pamphlet accompanying the exhibition of *Zero* series paintings) 'the spectator... [provoke] the change and the meaning in these works.' That is to say, a demand for the spectator relinquish the language to which they are accustomed or acculturated and embrace an *other* language, custom, culture. The complexity of this demand/challenge, and thus the manner by which the *Black Paintings* neither speak easily nor are easily spoken, reflects the complexity of this other. In the case of Hotere and his work, this other might be (albeit, inadequately) represented/symbolised thus '.../Te Aupōuri/Māori/Catholic/Western Modern painter/Post-war artist in Aotearoa/New Zealand/political activist/...'

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid, 16.

⁵⁹⁹ Susan Sontag, 'The Aesthetics of Silence' in *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1969, originally published in *Aspen Magazine*, n5+6, The Minimalism Issue, Fall-Winter 1967, np, <http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen5and6/index.html>, (06.08.13)), 11.

In light of the preceding discussion, Pound deserves credit for recognising that, paradoxically, 'Hotere's reticence' is a kind of 'not-speaking' that, nevertheless, bears witness to a 'speaking'. Nevertheless, Pound's subsequent analysis of the *Black Paintings* of 1968 evinces two features exemplary of the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence'. Firstly, Pound explicitly privileges the actions of Hotere-the-artist-individual and, in this way, reifies Hotere's speaking. Secondly, however, and in common with earlier commentators such as McNamara, Collier, and Leech, Pound invests in the idea that Hotere's *Black Paintings* are formally autonomous. That is to say, in suggesting that Hotere's works fully speak in and of themselves, Pound demands Hotere's silence. Thus, in the former case, whilst denying that 'Hotere's black paintings were necessarily *influenced* by Reinhardt's pungent brevities', Pound finds it 'encouraging' that, in the 1960s, Hotere specifically referred to Reinhardt's writing on at least two occasions.⁶⁰⁰ Proposing, therefore, 'simply to use' Reinhardt's texts 'as Hotere himself twice did, as a convenient way in', Pound declares his intention to

...use the protocols for making one body of black paintings (Reinhardt's) as protocols for describing another (Hotere's). Where they miss should be as instructive as where they hit: we shall learn to see what Hotere is by seeing what he is not.⁶⁰¹

Pound's posited *modus operandi* is noteworthy for demonstrating a sensitivity to the possibilities of analyses that are non-essentialist, non-traditionalising, and differential. At the same time, however, Pound's acknowledgement of Hotere's referencing of Reinhardt in the 1960s, contained, moreover, within the frame of Hotere's annotated Reinhardt catalogue of 1997, demonstrates to what extent reading Hotere through Reinhardt is enlivened and legitimised by *Hotere's* precedents – i.e., implicitly privileges the individual art subject called 'Hotere'.

⁶⁰⁰ Pound, 'Tiger Country', 15. For details of the two 'uses' of Reinhardt's writings by Hotere, see chapter one, n148.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid, 15.

That Pound's analysis of Hotere's *Black Paintings* appeals to formal autonomy follows from the reading of these works in light of the intentional antinomy stated in Reinhardt's 'ART IN ART IS ART AS ART, *Art-as-Art Dogma, part three*' (1966). Here, as Pound points out, Reinhardt asserts that 'Poetry is art is poetry' and 'Poetry in art is not poetry'.⁶⁰² In Pound's opinion, the first formulation implies that 'painted writing does not fully turn into paint, or, at least, it does not cease to signify as writing, even if in its materiality it *has* become paint.' The second formulation refers to the degree to which (in what Pound fully acknowledges are 'the words of an earlier formalism') 'all art aspires to... a state of autonomy from the world – and of a complete refusal to imitate it.' If this state of affairs obtains, Pound contends that

... 'poetry', in the sense of a given medium charged with its maximum intensity, is painting, or painting as painting is meant to be – painting, say, as it is given to us in Hotere's early black paintings. In which case, 'poetry in art is not poetry'. It is art.⁶⁰³

That Pound genuinely advocates for the notion of formal autonomy would appear to be confirmed by his characterisation of Hotere's later re-admission of poetry into his work as 'succumbing to the prevailing literary nature of most twentieth-century New Zealand art.' Again, one may draw an illustrative parallel with Sontag's 'Aesthetics of Silence', in which it is suggested that language is 'the most impure, the most contaminated, the most exhausted of all the materials out of which art is made'.⁶⁰⁴

In making these assertions, Pound and Sontag appear to invest in the formalist notion of painting (or art-making in general) purified of anything *other than* painting – specifically, words (or other conventionally linguistic or symbolic gestures) about, of, in or, otherwise, accompanying painting. In so doing, however, I would argue that both writers insist on making untenable distinctions between writing and painting, graphic and

⁶⁰² Reinhardt, 'ART IN ART IS ART AS ART, *Art-as-Art Dogma, part three*', *Lugano Review*, v1, n5-6, Summer 1966, 85-89, cited in Pound, 'Tiger Country', 16.

⁶⁰³ Pound, 'Tiger Country', 16-17.

⁶⁰⁴ Sontag, 14.

plastic, symbolic and pictorial. As suggested in chapter three, insofar as painting defines a *grammar of form* and a *space of meaning*, always already it is the case that painting *is* language-mediated: always already it is the case that painting is *painting in and of signs*. Always already, in other words, painting *is* by virtue of being enmeshed in a world of meaning that exceeds and eludes distinctions between what is ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ a particular painting or, indeed, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the categories of ‘painting’ and ‘poetry’. This implies that ‘pure’ or ‘absolute’ painting and poetry are impossible ideals – on which basis, I would reject Pound’s claim that in

...refusing entry to the poets, Hotere’s early black paintings are *absolute poetry*... poetic to a degree disallowed by the literal presence of poetic texts. They are the most poetic paintings he has ever made.⁶⁰⁵

Indeed, I would suggest that, in its reification of impossibly ‘pure’ or ‘absolute’ painting and poetry, Pound’s essay exemplifies the desire to realise the ineffable *objet petit a* – in this case, synonymous with the creation of the formally autonomous artwork wherein (as proposed in chapter five) there is expressed the impossible speaking the unspeakable or eloquent speech proper to the *point de capiton* ‘Hotere’s reticence’.

⁶⁰⁵ Pound, ‘Tiger Country’, 17. Pound’s formalist perspective is also evident from his reference to ‘Reinhardt’s ultimate painted statements, the black paintings (1956-66)’ (11).

6.3 Praxes of contradiction: McCahon's *vision of doubt* and Hotere's *eloquent reticence*

6.3.1 The vision of doubt: McCahon's questioning faith

The idea that McCahon is a visionary precisely insofar *as* he doubts, in relation to which one may speak of a seemingly contradictory *vision of doubt*, is implicit in Curnow's *Art New Zealand* essay 'Thinking about Colin McCahon and Barnett Newman' (1977-78). Here, Curnow revisits the question of McCahon's artistic 'eccentricity', previously elaborated in his *Listener* article 'Devotions Unlimited' and the essay included in the catalogue for the exhibition *McCahon's "Necessary Protection"*. In the *Art New Zealand* piece, Curnow proposes that the eccentricity of McCahon's *oeuvre* reflects McCahon's conception of truth – in effect, the manner by which McCahon engages not with *the Truth*, absolute, universal, total and univocal, but on the contrary, with *truths* that are, inherently, contingent, local, partial and multivalent. To this extent, McCahon's creative activity is doubting insofar as it reflects a questioning of the existence of an epistemological absolute. With reference to Morse Peckham's essay 'Rebellion and Deviance' (1973), Curnow refers to this as the post-Enlightenment 'crisis of failed meta-explanations' (i.e., the undermining of both a Christian and an Enlightenment faith in the existence of absolute standards of truth and knowledge – secured, in the former case, by appealing to the notion of divine omnipotence and omnipresence, and in the latter case, by appealing to the power of human reason). In consequence, Curnow characterises McCahon's *modus operandi* as a 'Romantic search activity' that engages not with *the Truth* but rather *truths* – in particular, those 'eccentric, incongruous... knowledges' associated with 'Christian and Maori myth'.⁶⁰⁶ Curnow suggests that McCahon's titling one series of work '*Practical Religion*' demonstrates how his Romantic search activity

⁶⁰⁶ Curnow, 'Thinking about Colin McCahon and Barnett Newman,' 48-49. Curnow makes reference to Morse Peckham, 'Rebellion and Deviance' in *Romanticism and Behaviour: collected essays II* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1976, originally presented at a comparative literature conference on the 'outsider', Tallahassee: Florida State University, January 1973), 80-81.

seeks ‘not true knowledge but knowledges of, for, use.’⁶⁰⁷ That is to say, knowledge takes the form of a *praxis of questioning* – neither a fixed point of reference nor an absolute sufficiency, but rather a way of negotiating particular contingencies. This said, Curnow allows that there remains a certain visionary dimension to McCahon’s art-making. For underlying McCahon’s multifaceted and eclectic engagement with *knowledges* is a belief in the *efficacy* of this practice. Hence, Curnow asserts of McCahon that

As an improviser, he obeys these injunctions: his art must change, it must be direct, it must be sacred – a matter of life and death. And in his obedience to them lies an affirmation that somehow lies outside all his doubts.⁶⁰⁸

Here, what is crucial is that the ‘affirmation’, to which Curnow refers, has no obvious basis in reason or logic. It is to this extent that McCahon’s ‘belief’ in the efficacy of sustaining a praxis of questioning is ‘visionary’ and, indeed, invites interpretation as an apparently paradoxical *vision of doubt*.

In the decade following Curnow’s article, the understanding of McCahon’s doubt in terms what I am calling a ‘vision of doubt’ is reiterated in at least three other commentaries on McCahon and his work. Compared with Curnow’s essay, these other pieces of writing may be distinguished by their tendency to consider the question of McCahon’s doubt in a more obviously theological or Christian context. In consequence, Curnow’s allusion to McCahon’s visionary ‘affirmation’ of a praxis of questioning becomes, in these other examples of McCahon scholarship, McCahon’s visionary engagement with the fundamental question or paradox of *faith*. Exemplary, in this regard, is Green’s ‘Review: I Will Need Words’ – in part, a response to Curnow’s untitled essay, included in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *I will need words*. Particularly relevant, in the present context, is Green’s acknowledgement and amplification of Curnow’s suggestion that the ambiguities inherent in the ‘I AM’ motif (in works such as *Victory over Death 2* and *Gate III*) resonate with the interrogative textual content of the

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid, 49.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid, 52.

Elias paintings – a correspondence Curnow attributes to the status of the works in question as ‘dramatisations of the crises of belief’.⁶⁰⁹ Reiterating Curnow’s recognition of the implicit question of being posed in the major text of *Victory over Death 2* (i.e., ‘AM I AM’), Green points out that, in *Practical Religion*, texts asserting ‘the conditions of Faith in the Gospel of Eternal Life and belief in the power of the Resurrection’ are subject to a similar qualification in the form of the challenge, posed in a capitalised, calligraphic aside, inserted at the lower right of the work: ‘DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?’⁶¹⁰ In Green’s view:

This leads to the opening of the question which is fundamental to these pictures, the question of Faith. In so far as McCahon does not simply proclaim a belief, the question remains open, doubt remains, and an implication of a doubt of the artist is to be taken.⁶¹¹

Green then addresses Curnow’s references to McCahon’s various admissions of doubt, by virtue of which McCahon’s assumption of a truly Christian identity is precluded. These include the testimony in *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition*, where, with regard to the *Elias* paintings, McCahon confesses, parenthetically, (‘I could never call myself a Christian, therefore these same doubts constantly assail me too.’) and, in relation to the *Practical Religion* works, ‘doubts do come in here too. I believe, but don’t believe...’⁶¹² On this basis, Green proposes that McCahon’s expressions of doubt ‘can be read, in the light of these pictures, as statements about the central difficulty of belief, or of Faith.’ Specifically, Green suggests that McCahon’s comments resonate with

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid, in the untitled essay included in McCahon, *I will need words*. The aforementioned interrogative textual content in the *Elias* paintings is, for example (and as Curnow acknowledges in his essay), evident in *Elias: Why cannot he save himself* (000139, April – August 1959, ref. 105) where the major script reads: ‘Elias/why/cannot/can’t he/save/save/him/himself’. Other notable examples (particularly where McCahon breaks syntax and indulges in repetition) include *Will he save him?* (000664, June-August 1959, ref. 106), which reads: ‘will he save him/let be/let be/will Elias/come to save/ever him never’ and *Was it worthwhile* (000414, August 1959, ref. 107), where the painted text reads: ‘was it/worthwhile/will/could/Elias/save him/save him’.

⁶¹⁰ Green, ‘Review: I Will Need Words’, 62-63.

⁶¹¹ Ibid, 63.

⁶¹² McCahon and O’Reilly, *Colin McCahon: a survey exhibition*, 27, 37.

The Reformation insistence on Salvation through Faith, as distinct from Salvation in and through the Sacraments, especially of the Eucharist', which 'makes of Faith something that must be attained, struggled for. It cannot be taken for granted as a given, as a starting point.

Thus, from Green's perspective, the Reformist dimension of McCahon's spiritual sensibility inheres in its resistance to the idea that faith = unquestioning performance of ritual or acceptance of dogma – as is enshrined in what Green refers to as pre-Reformation 'Revealed Christian Doctrine': the 'key' to the absolute and incontestable meaning of 'Both the world and the Book'.⁶¹³

To put the matter equivalently, in Green's view, what McCahon doubts is the notion that spiritual enlightenment or salvation lies in unquestioning adherence to certain ritual forms (e.g., the Eucharist). Indeed, implicit in Green's observation that 'The distance between signifier and signified is abolished in the rite of the Eucharist, in which the sign becomes the Flesh of the Real Presence, the supreme metonymy' is the idea that, within the very forms and materials of ritual activity, 'Salvation in and through the Sacraments' is, simultaneously, an embodying/encoding – a perfect coincidence of form and meaning, signifier and signified, by virtue of which the absolute is made present and presenced absolutely.⁶¹⁴ It is precisely the possibility of realising this presencing that McCahon places in question – on which basis, Green characterises McCahon's spiritual sensibility in terms of maintaining a distance between signifier and signified, of suspending/delaying meaning determinations: 'For McCahon there is always a gap between the utterance of the message in its signs and its reception by the reader/beholder.'⁶¹⁵ To this extent, Green's assessment of McCahon's doubt clearly harmonises with that presented by Curnow in 'Thinking about Colin McCahon and Barnett Newman' (although Green eschews considerations of Enlightenment rationality and restricts his analysis to the

⁶¹³ Green, 'Review: I Will Need Words', 63.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

‘failed meta-explanation’ of (pre-Reformation) Christianity). That is to say, the complementary obverse of McCahon’s doubt in the efficacy of ‘Salvation in and through the Sacraments’ is what amounts to *faith in and as a praxis of questioning*. The term ‘faith’ applies insofar as McCahon’s belief in the *value* and *efficacy* of the praxis resists logical or rational justification.

Here, however, one may observe a certain irony. In the performance of the sacraments, the ‘supreme metonymy’, to which Green refers, admits consideration as a vanishing of the gulf dividing the realms of the mortal and the divine – a vanishing of the mortal self into the absolute, divine unity and sufficiency. From this perspective, the resistance to a pre-Reformation insistence on adherence to ritual (which tends to objectify subjects and suppress agency in favour of automatism) can be regarded as a reification of the status of the individual. It may be noted that such an exaltation of individuality is a *point de capiton* prominent in the discourse of Romanticism and, indeed, also is implicit in Curnow’s account of McCahon’s doubt in terms of a ‘Romantic search activity’ (i.e., McCahon-the-artist-individual actively seeks *truths* as opposed to being the passive recipient of *the Truth*).⁶¹⁶ However, insofar as the reification of the individual becomes a preferred or desired *mode* of being or subjective expression (that is to say, a *praxis*), the very means by which the subversion of one praxis/metonymy/automatism (namely, unquestioning adherence to the Sacraments) is attained itself assumes the status of a praxis/metonymy/automatism on another level. Insofar as the question of faith resolves into a *praxis* (i.e., a continual, repetitive performance), its final resolution is indefinitely deferred and, by the same token, the belief in its very efficacy is revealed to be, itself, the product of a leap of faith. In acquiescing to or conforming with this necessity, one confronts one’s own insufficiency, incompleteness, or becoming in the very act of one’s reification.

⁶¹⁶ For discussion of the reification of individuality in Romantic thought see, for example, Mitchell Benjamin Frank, *German Romantic Painting Redefined, Nazarene tradition and the narratives of Romanticism* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2001), 37-47.

Green's understanding of McCahon's doubt in terms of a faith in and as a praxis of questioning is reiterated in two subsequent commentaries on McCahon and his work – Alexa Johnston's 'Godtalk – McCahon and Theology' (1988) and McKenzie's 'Celestial Lavatories' (1989). It will be convenient to discuss these essays in parallel insofar as both writers (1) address an apparent reluctance, in McCahon discourse, to engage with or acknowledge the 'Christian' dimension of McCahon's work, and (2) locate McCahon's 'questioning faith' within the context of Christian theology. To this end, one might begin with Johnston's contention that

...there is a *skandalon*, a stumbling block which still lies at the centre of McCahon's work... [in] his insistent exploring of issues of doubt and faith, of hope and despair, in a consciously Christian framework.⁶¹⁷

In Lacanian terms, Johnston's invocation of the *skandalon* resonates with the status of the *point de capiton* 'McCahon's doubt' as a symptomatic formation – a repetitive stutter by which McCahon discourse evinces a desire to recover the primordially lost/fundamentally irresolvable *objet petit a*. Johnston identifies this *skandalon* with a certain reluctance (among arts consumers, institutions, etc.) to acknowledge the religiosity of McCahon's art – although she provides only two examples in support of this claim. The first of these is an entirely anecdotal observation from an art curator based in the United States and thus, perhaps, of limited value.⁶¹⁸ However, Johnston's second example clearly resonates with the contradictions proper to the figure of McCahon's doubt in McCahon discourse – namely, the title of the exhibition *McCahon: 'Religious' Works 1946 – 1952* (1975). Echoing admissions made in the accompanying catalogue by the exhibition curator, Luit Bieringa, Johnston observes that placing the word 'religious' in inverted commas immediately signals a degree of equivocation.⁶¹⁹ Indeed, in Johnston's view, Bieringa's

⁶¹⁷ Alexa M. Johnston, 'God-talk – McCahon and Theology' in Auckland City Art Gallery, *Colin McCahon, Gates and Journeys*, exh. cat. (Auckland: 1988), 55.

⁶¹⁸ See Margy P. Sharpe (curator at the National Museum of American Art, Washington D.C.) in a letter to Johnston dated 22 February 1988 and cited in Johnston, 'God-talk', 56, 67 (n2).

⁶¹⁹ Johnston, 'God-talk', 56. See also Bieringa, 'Colin McCahon: "Religious" Works 1946-52' in McCahon, *McCahon: 'religious' works, 1946 – 1952*, 3, where it is asserted:

comments evince a certain ‘anxiety’ and ‘nervousness’ that a ‘ “strictly Christian” interpretation’ might damage the credibility of McCahon’s work. As Johnston points out, Bieringa seems concerned that the religious or Christian dimension of McCahon’s creative activity may be seen as ‘purist, narrow, inflexible’ – an impediment that demands to be overcome if one is to avoid the ‘nagging suspicion that McCahon has somehow let us down by being a great twentieth century painter yet insisting on “bringing religion into it”.’⁶²⁰

McKenzie’s article opens with an acknowledgement of Johnston’s suggestion that there is a ‘prevailing reluctance to address the “religious content” of McCahon’s painting.’ More significantly, however, McKenzie identifies a glaringly obvious example that Johnston overlooks – namely, Curnow’s essay: ‘Thinking about Colin McCahon and Barnett Newman’. In McKenzie’s view, Curnow’s ‘high opinion of McCahon and low opinion of Christianity’ inheres in the insistence that Christianity is an ‘ “eccentric knowledge” ’ that McCahon ‘does not regard... as true, so much as useful.’⁶²¹ Although McKenzie does not press this point, one might ask whether Johnston’s failure to engage with Curnow was precluded by Curnow’s status as a co-contributor to *Colin McCahon, Gates and Journeys*? If so, Johnston’s essay evinces a certain irony – perpetrating, on another level of McCahon discourse, the very *skandalon* it seeks to elaborate and undermine.

Notwithstanding Johnston’s oversight (the precise reasons for which, it should be admitted, are purely speculative), her willingness to acknowledge that McCahon’s engagement with Christianity admits a positive dimension facilitates the part of her

The title of the exhibition specifically qualifies the adjective ‘religious’ so as to avoid any narrow interpretations of the term, to avoid labelling the works as strictly Christian despite their obvious Christian symbolism, for, just as McCahon has continued to stretch the limits of painting, so has he extended the bounds of purist theology or narrow inflexible creeds.

⁶²⁰ Johnston, ‘God-talk’, 57.

⁶²¹ McKenzie, ‘Celestial Lavatories’, *Antic*, n6, November 1989, 35. In the name of accuracy, I should point out that, in his footnotes (35, n3), McKenzie incorrectly attributes to Johnston Curnow’s characterisation of Christianity as an ‘eccentric knowledge’.

argument that is of greatest significance in the present context. Namely, the degree to which ‘McCahon seems... to be at home in the questioning tradition of theological thought’ and the manner by which ‘his paintings exist within the questioning tradition of Christian faith’ – i.e., the degree to which McCahon’s painting reflects currents in contemporary theology that are characterised not by dogmatic inflexibility, but rather by what Johnston refers to as ‘rigorous debate’ and a ‘broadening of terms of reference’ in relation to the ultimate questions of human existence.⁶²² In substantiating this claim, Johnston appeals to arguments presented in Ronald Gregor Smith’s *The Doctrine of God* (1970) and Allan Galloway’s *Faith in a Changing Culture* (1967), in relation to which she conveys two, further points of critical importance. In the first place, Johnston suggests that faith cannot be explained or defined in relation to matters of knowledge and belief but rather demands to be considered as ‘something more than belief... a total attitude to life and a commitment to a way of life.’ By way of Smith’s account of Paul Tillich’s conception of the divine as ‘Being-itself’, Johnston presents a conception of faith as concerned less with the *ontic* dimension of particular beings (i.e., *what is*) than with the *ontological* mode of Being considered as a *way* or *process of becoming*.⁶²³ Secondly, Johnston refers to Galloway’s elucidation of Tillich’s conception of faith as ‘the state of being ultimately concerned’.⁶²⁴ As Galloway points out, ‘ultimate concern’ is a ‘transcendental concept in the strict Kantian sense’ insofar as it is (1) an *a priori*

⁶²² Johnston, ‘God-talk’, 59, 67.

⁶²³ Ibid, 60-61. In support of this idea, Johnston appeals to discussion in Ronald Gregor Smith, *The Doctrine of God*, edited and prepared for publication by K. Gregor Smith and A.D. Galloway (London: Collins, 1970). Here, Smith (101) refers to the advocacy of an ontological conception of divinity made in Paul Tillich, *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press and James Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1955), 82-83.

⁶²⁴ Johnston, ‘God-talk’, 61. In support of this idea, Johnston’s primary reference is Galloway, *Faith in a Changing Culture* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967) – in particular, Galloway’s response to the definition of faith given in Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1957), 1, as ‘the state of being ultimately concerned’. Here, I should point out that, whilst Galloway (13) acknowledges Tillich as the source of this definition, he neither mentions Tillich’s book nor provides any other explicit reference. Indeed, Galloway’s book lacks a Bibliography. Johnston compounds this difficulty by reproducing Galloway’s paraphrase of Tillich in the main body of her text – without, however, providing page references either in Tillich or Galloway.

condition of possibility according to which, in lived experience, faith is structured and actualised, and yet (2) that which is, in its essence, unavailable to such experience.⁶²⁵ In other words, the *efficacy* of the conception of faith as ultimate concern resists objective, empirical, rational determination and, in consequence, must be taken, as it were, *on faith*. However, rather than seeking to resolve this antinomy, Galloway insists that ‘This paradoxical element is essential to authentic faith. Indeed it becomes the touchstone of its authenticity.’⁶²⁶ In consequence, Johnston concludes that ‘Galloway sees questioning, tension and paradox as essential elements which characterise rather than compromise an authentic faith.’⁶²⁷

Whilst making no reference to Johnston’s essay beyond the preliminary acknowledgement mentioned previously, it is noteworthy that McKenzie’s article recapitulates several of Johnston’s primary observations. Specifically, by way of appeals to Kierkegaard’s philosophy of religion, McKenzie reiterates Johnston’s understanding of McCahon’s vision of doubt in terms of a faith in and as praxes of (1) *becoming*, (2) *questioning*, (3) *embracing paradox*.⁶²⁸ Beginning with McCahon’s admission: ‘I could never call myself a Christian, therefore these... doubts constantly assail me too’, McKenzie proposes that ‘Rather than negating the Christian way, this statement can be taken as valorising doubt as vital to Christianity.’⁶²⁹ In support of this claim, McKenzie observes, firstly, that McCahon’s statement is ‘an exact echo’ of Kierkegaard’s sentiments, according to which Kierkegaard repudiates the practice of Christianity as

⁶²⁵ Galloway, *Faith in a Changing Culture*, 27.

⁶²⁶ Ibid, 28.

⁶²⁷ Johnston, ‘God-talk’, 61.

⁶²⁸ In this regard, I note that McKenzie’s essay does not directly engage with Kierkegaard’s writings, depending almost entirely on a secondary source: Mark C. Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood, Hegel & Kierkegaard* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1980). In seeking to validate McKenzie’s appeals to Kierkegaard’s philosophy, I have, also, made recourse to Taylor. However, in order to be as rigorous as possible, I reference the twenty six volumes of *Kierkegaard’s Writings* edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (some of which, it must be conceded, were unavailable at the time McKenzie’s article was composed).

⁶²⁹ McKenzie, ‘Celestial Lavatories’, 36, 38.

slavish or complacent adherence to doctrine in favour of a vision of Christianity as an unattainable ideal to which one must continually aspire (i.e., in Kierkegaard's view, being truly Christian is neither an accomplished fact nor the product of a primal baptism but rather a state towards which one must struggle in a never-ending process of becoming).⁶³⁰ Secondly, McKenzie suggests that Kierkegaard conceives of being Christian as 'the relentless task of hazarding guesses, elaborating possibilities, undermining solutions, confronting oneself as a question-mark' in which one assumes the position of the 'Socratic educator' who 'must question but not presume to answer.'⁶³¹ Thirdly,

⁶³⁰ Ibid, 36. In relation to the idea that the Kierkegaardian ideal is a state of being towards which one must struggle in a never-ending process of becoming see, for example, Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript To Philosophical Fragments: A Mimical-Pathetical-Dialectical Compilation, An Existential Contribution*, v1, in *Kierkegaard's Writings, XII.1, Concluding Unscientific Postscript To Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, originally published as Johannes Climacus, ed. S. Kierkegaard, *Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift til de filosofiske Smuler. Mimisk-pathetisk-dialektisk Sammenskrift, Existentielt Indlæg* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 1846). Here, Kierkegaard presents a validation of subjective (as opposed to objective) religious thinking on the basis that:

Whereas objective thinking invests everything in the result and assists all humankind to cheat by copying and reeling off the results and answers, subjective thinking invests everything in the process of becoming and omits the result... (73)

In consequence, Kierkegaard favours subjective religious thinking for its efficacy in communicating the 'conviction' that 'truth is inwardness; objectively there is no truth, but the appropriation [i.e., the way or taking possession of/responsibility for the truth-making] is the truth' (77), and 'the truth is not the truth but... the way is the truth, that is, the truth is only in the becoming, in the process of appropriation... [and] consequently there is no [objectively verifiable] result' (78). Indeed, in his Conclusion, Kierkegaard insists: '*No one begins with being Christian; each one becomes that in the fullness of time – if one becomes that*' (591).

⁶³¹ McKenzie, 'Celestial Lavatories', 36. With regard to the idea that Kierkegaard considers questioning to be an intrinsic aspect of being Christian see, for example, Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, With Continual Reference to Socrates* in *Kierkegaard's Writings, II, The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates together with Notes of Schelling's Berlin Lectures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, originally published as *Om Begrebet Ironi med stadigt Hensyn til Socrates* (Copenhagen: P.G. Philipsen, 1841), 36-37. Here, Kierkegaard draws a distinction between speculative and ironic questioning. Speculative questioning asks 'with the intention of receiving an answer containing the desired fullness, and hence the more one asks, the deeper and more significant becomes the answer' whilst ironic questioning asks 'without any interest in the answer except to suck out the apparent content by means of the question and thereby to leave an emptiness behind.' As Kierkegaard points out, speculative questioning presumes 'plenitude' – i.e., presupposes and/or demands the possibility of being satiated, of there being, in Kierkegaard's parlance, an objective 'result'. By contrast, ironic questioning presumes 'emptiness' and, on this basis, is a questioning intended, primarily, to perpetuate the activity of questioning. Kierkegaard asserts that 'Socrates in particular practised the latter [i.e., ironic]

McKenzie observes that, for Kierkegaard, a defining tenet of Christianity – namely, divine incarnation in the figure of Christ – is an ‘Absolute Paradox’ or ‘logical impossibility’, the acceptance of which has no basis in reason but, on the contrary, demands a ‘“leap of faith”’.⁶³² Indeed, in *The Sickness unto Death. A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening* (1849), Kierkegaard insists that the fundamental test of faith is whether one ‘will believe that for God everything is possible... But this is the very formula for losing the understanding; to believe is indeed to lose the understanding in order to gain God.’⁶³³ This comment reveals to what extent Kierkegaard understands faith as that which necessitates (indeed, as that which simply *is*) the embracing of paradox in the face of reason. Moreover (as McKenzie observes), that Kierkegaard acknowledges the difficulty in attaining and sustaining this faith is evident from his reference to the ‘battle of *faith*, battling madly if you will, for possibility, because possibility is the only salvation.’⁶³⁴

method’ and thereby ‘expelled... [the] poetic vapors’ by which ‘the Sophists... had befogged themselves in their own eloquence’.

⁶³² McKenzie, ‘Celestial Lavatories’, 38-39. For a reference to Kierkegaard’s conception of Christianity as an ‘absolute paradox’ see, for example, Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Here, Kierkegaard asserts that ‘The thesis that God has existed in human form, was born, grew up, etc. is certainly the... absolute paradox... [that] can be related only to the absolute difference by which a human being differs from God’ (217). Still further, Kierkegaard insists that ‘Christianity is not a doctrine, but it expresses an existence-contradiction and is an existence-communication’ – where the ‘existence-contradiction’ ultimately inheres in the ‘absolute paradox’ of divine incarnation and the ‘existence-communication’ in the ‘prodigious existence-task [*Existents-Opgave*]’ of understanding (1) that Christianity is ‘to be existed in’ and (2) the ‘difficulty of existing in it’ (379-80).

⁶³³ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death. A Christian Psychological Exposition For Upbuilding And Awakening* in *Kierkegaard’s Writings, XIX* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, originally published as *Anti-Climacus*, ed. S. Kierkegaard, *Sygdommen til Døden. En christelig psykologisk Udvikling til Opbyggelse og Opvækkelse* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 1849), 38.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.* See also McKenzie, ‘Celestial Lavatories’, 39.

6.3.2 Eloquent reticence: Hotere's effecting discursive silence

The idea that Hotere is eloquent insofar *as* he is reticent, on which basis one may posit a seemingly contradictory *eloquent reticence*, is particularly evident in writing suggesting that, historically, there has been *no* substantial Hotere discourse – where, crucially, *Hotere's* reticence (expressed either in the obduracy of Hotere-the-person or in the challenges Hotere's work presents to interpretation) is specifically implicated as the *cause* of this *discursive* silence. As noted in the thesis Introduction, acknowledgement of this phenomenon may be found in Wedde's *Landfall* review article, 'Figure it Out'. Here, it is observed that

Hotere's unwillingness to discuss his work has become mythical and this reticence is often elided with the sparseness of writing, as though the artist's silence explains and amplifies the absence of critical record.⁶³⁵

Wedde goes on to suggest that the 'silences' associated with Hotere-the-artist-individual or with the discourse on Hotere (i.e., the idea that this discourse is *absent*)

...have sometimes been applauded as unpretentious integrity and this has, in turn, been elided with an oversimplified modernist dictum that expects works of art to speak for themselves.⁶³⁶

Notwithstanding its sophisticated approach and recognition of Hotere's 'much mythologised refusal to frame the work in words', Pound's aforementioned essay 'Tiger Country' would appear to exemplify the kind of writing to which Wedde alludes. Relevant, in this regard, is Pound's suggestion that

Not only do Hotere's early black paintings negate speech inside themselves... They make respondent speech difficult... Hence the almost complete lack of critical writing around Hotere's wordless black paintings.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁵ Wedde 'Figure it Out', 179.

⁶³⁶ Ibid, 179.

⁶³⁷ Pound, 'Tiger Country', 16.

Moreover, as previously discussed, the degree to which Pound considers Hotere's *Black Paintings* of 1968 to be formally autonomous (i.e., to 'speak for themselves') is evident from the characterisation of these works as an '*absolute poetry... poetic to a degree disallowed by the literal presence of poetic texts*'.

However, I would suggest that this aspect of the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence' may be elaborated even more usefully with reference to three texts from the latter 1990s that, variously, demand, offer to enact, or reflect on what might be termed Hotere's 'institutional rehabilitation'. The exemplary signs of this 'second coming' were twofold. Firstly, there was the publication of O'Brien's *Hotere, Out The Black Window* – the most elaborate monograph on Hotere and his work produced up to that point. Secondly, there was the presentation of the national touring show, *Hotere – out the black window* (1997-98) (which O'Brien curated in association with the City Gallery, Wellington) – noteworthy as the most extensive, institutional gesture devoted to Hotere and his work since the national touring show *Ralph Hotere, A survey 1963-73*.⁶³⁸ The three texts in

⁶³⁸ According to various sources, *Hotere – out the black window* toured all four main centres between June 1997 and September 1998. As noted in Elizabeth Kerr and Mary Trewby, 'A Chronology of Ralph Hotere' in *Ralph Hotere: Black Light*, 127, the exhibition debuted at Wellington City Art Gallery, 7 June – 14 September 1997. According to Charmian Smith, 'What's on', *Otago Daily Times*, 2 December 1997, 16, the exhibition was presented at Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 6 December 1997 – 8 February 1998. In the 'Current Exhibitions' section of Robert McDougall Art Gallery and Annex, *Bulletin*, n111, December 1997 – February 1998, np, http://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/media/uploads/2010_07/Bulletin_111.pdf, (28.05.14), the Christchurch schedule of *Hotere – out the black window* is given as 5 February – 19 April 1998. Finally, in Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, *Auckland Art Gallery Exhibition History* (Auckland, December 2013), np, http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/media/1514410/aag_exhibition_history_dec2013.pdf, (28.05.14), it is stated that *Hotere – out the black window* was shown 4 July – 6 September 1998.

It may be observed that Hotere's status as a key figure in the art canon of Aotearoa/New Zealand received further validation in the form of the national touring exhibition *Ralph Hotere: Black Light* (2000-2001) and the publication of the accompanying catalogue. As noted in Kerr and Trewby, 128, the exhibition in question debuted at Dunedin Public Art Gallery 4 March – 21 May 2000. In Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, *Auckland Art Gallery Exhibition History*, it is stated that *Ralph Hotere: Black Light* was shown at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki 10 June – 23 August 2000. Finally, according to Josie McNaught, 'Grandeur in black', *Dominion*, 26 October 2000, 18, in its culminating phase, *Ralph Hotere: Black Light* was presented at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington 28 October 2000 – 25 February 2001.

question comprise O'Brien's *Landfall* interview with Manhire: 'Some Paintings I Am Frequently Asked About', Jonathan Mane-Wheoki's *Landfall* review article, 'Hotere – out the black window' (1997), and Keith Stewart's seminar piece, 'I Do, Ralph Hotere And Constructive Silence' (1998). In each of these documents, the suggestion that Hotere's reticence is implicated in discursive silence is, itself, enmeshed in various ambiguities or contradictions. Thus, in the first place, one encounters the claim that discursive silence is a product of *Hotere's* reticence *and institutional* dereliction of duty. Secondly, one finds the assertion that the New Zealand arts establishment has failed to fully meet its responsibilities towards Hotere *and* Hotere and/or his work has attracted ever-increasing institutional recognition, commanding widespread admiration and respect.

Consider, for example, O'Brien's opening statement, in 'Some Paintings I Am Frequently Asked About', where it is observed that

Ralph Hotere is a singular if elusive figure in recent New Zealand art... Hotere is an intensely private person whose reticence has almost certainly contributed to the paucity of in-depth critical writing about his work over the past two decades, during which time the institutional and public recognition of his work has increased markedly. The absence of a published monograph on Hotere's work is *the* extraordinary oversight of New Zealand art history.⁶³⁹

Here, one encounters the claim, proper to the special case of the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence' in question, that not only is there a 'paucity of in-depth critical writing' on Hotere's work but that this is a state of affairs to which Hotere's 'reticence has almost certainly contributed'. It may be evident that an underlying implication of this remark is that 'in-depth critical writing' on art demands validation by the person of the artist. To this extent, O'Brien's article would seem to privilege the artist individual as the exemplary point of reference enabling and securing determinations of the meaning of the work. This said, O'Brien also offers the counter claim that, notwithstanding the

⁶³⁹ O'Brien, 'Some Paintings I Am Frequently Asked About', 21. It may be noted that the very title of O'Brien's essay obliquely reifies the idea of Hotere's reticence insofar as it implies that Hotere's *persistent* refusal to account for his work results in questions being *frequently* addressed to Manhire – one of the pre-eminent donors of words employed in Hotere's paintings.

significant expansion of ‘institutional and public recognition of... [Hotere’s] work’ over the last twenty years, ‘The absence of a published monograph on Hotere’s work is *the* extraordinary oversight of New Zealand art history’. In this regard, in advocating Hotere’s institutional reification, O’Brien places the responsibility for the discursive silence surrounding Hotere onto the, implicitly, neglectful arts establishment of New Zealand – or, to be more precise, the not-quite-clearly-defined sector of this arts establishment that might undertake the ‘in-depth critical writing’ of a ‘New Zealand art history’.

However, when one examines documentation related to the production of the text that would offer to fill this lack (i.e., O’Brien’s *Hotere, Out The Black Window*, published just over a year after the *Landfall* article in question), it becomes evident to what extent the successful orchestration of Hotere’s institutional re-ascendancy is attributed to a negotiation or overcoming of Hotere’s reticence. For example, on the basis of a faxed communication exchanged between O’Brien and Rodney Kirk-Smith in mid 1996, it is clear that, before proceeding, O’Brien clearly desired Hotere’s blessing. This is evident from the disenchantment O’Brien expresses over Hotere’s failure to reply to letters and phone messages, and O’Brien’s proposal to withdraw from the book project.⁶⁴⁰ Still further, Peter Kitchin’s *Evening Post* review article ‘Hotere: artist in verse and paint’ (1997) recounts how O’Brien ‘found a way through Hotere’s reservations.’ In Kitchin’s report, O’Brien credits Kirk-Smith (Hotere’s longstanding, Auckland dealer) with giving ‘Hotere a nudge’. Subsequently, O’Brien and Hotere discussed the book project at Kirk-Smith’s funeral. Kitchin concludes:

The result was that O’Brien’s work accelerated. The exhibition, and O’Brien’s book with the same title, is as much a testament to his fortitude as to his scholarship.⁶⁴¹

⁶⁴⁰ See, for example, O’Brien, faxed letter to Rodney Kirk-Smith dated 16 July 1996, courtesy of University of Otago, Hocken Collections Te Uare Taoka o Hākena, ‘Papers relating to Gregory O’Brien’s proposed biography of Ralph Hotere, 1996, Rodney Kirk-Smith Art Records (ARC-0190), MS-1459/961, MS-1459/961’, accessed 27-29.08.13.

⁶⁴¹ Peter Kitchin, ‘Hotere: artist in verse and paint’, *Evening Post*, 7 June 1997, 12.

The ambiguities present in O'Brien's interview with Manhire are reiterated in Mane-Wheoki's review of O'Brien's book and the accompanying touring show. Mane-Wheoki's opening comments paint a picture of Hotere as an artist of national significance who has endured a degree of establishment indifference that is unfathomable – if not unconscionable. Thus, whilst there is cause 'to celebrate' the publication of O'Brien's book and the accompanying touring exhibition, Mane-Wheoki stresses the belatedness of these gestures in remarking on 'the first major exhibition to be devoted to Ralph Hotere's art in more than twenty years, and the publication of a substantial monograph – at long last.' Even more emphatically, Mane-Wheoki asserts:

In retrospect, the yawning interval of time New Zealand's art establishment has allowed to elapse, the institutional neglect of an artist of undisputed mana, whose career spans almost half a century, might be regarded as scandalous.

Indeed, in a fashion that not only contradicts O'Brien's view that 'over the past two decades... institutional and public recognition of... [Hotere's] work has increased markedly' but also Mane-Wheoki's own claim that Hotere is 'an artist of *undisputed* mana' (my italics), Mane-Wheoki goes so far as to imply that institutional mistreatment of Hotere and his work is perennial:

...since the unfortunate abandonment of the national tour of his survey exhibition in 1975, after two-thirds of the works were badly damaged in transit, Hotere has tended to be taken for granted, occasionally overlooked and even ignored...⁶⁴²

This said, and precisely in accordance with the ambiguities previously identified with the absence of discourse on Hotere and his work, Mane-Wheoki also speculates that, in concert with Hotere's residence in Dunedin since 1969, 'beyond the immediate horizons of Wellington's culture brokers, and Auckland's'...

⁶⁴² Mane-Wheoki, 'Hotere – out the black window', *Landfall* 194, new series, v5, n2, November 1997, 233.

Maybe the artist's disinclination... "to discuss or explain his work, preferring to let the work exist on its own very broad terms"... has, hitherto, deterred art writers and curators from attempting anything more than scattered reviews and articles, and inclusion in the odd survey exhibition.⁶⁴³

Moreover, echoing the view that O'Brien's book and the accompanying exhibition necessitated a negotiation of Hotere's reticence, Mane-Wheoki remarks that

To have gained the artist's trust and co-operation, in view of his oft-stated reticence, as O'Brien has so obviously done, in order to undertake this project, is in itself no small achievement.⁶⁴⁴

Before proceeding to address Stewart's seminar piece, the striking difference in degree between O'Brien's moderate suggestion that, historically, 'in-depth critical writing' on Hotere has been lacking and Mane-Wheoki's much stronger claim of 'institutional neglect' merits further attention. Here, I would argue that, in the period 1975-97, if one considers the number of Hotere's works acquired for public collections, the quantity and scale of exhibitions in which Hotere's work was featured, and references to Hotere in publications such as *Art New Zealand* then Mane-Wheoki's claim seems somewhat exaggerated.⁶⁴⁵ This said, Mane-Wheoki's comments would appear to reflect his fervent conviction that Hotere is 'clearly well overdue for institutional recognition on a grand scale' – where, moreover, neither the touring exhibition nor O'Brien's monograph 'set out to be the long-awaited retrospective... [or] the definitive catalogue of... [Hotere's] *oeuvre*.'⁶⁴⁶ Whilst it is unclear what Mane-Wheoki would consider to be 'institutional recognition on a grand scale', it is undeniable that Hotere's work has yet to receive the level of institutional support devoted to internationally presented shows such as *Colin McCahon: Gates and Journeys* (1988-89) or *Colin McCahon, A Question of Faith* (2002-

⁶⁴³ Ibid. Mane-Wheoki quotes O'Brien, *Hotere, Out The Black Window*, 27.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid, 238.

⁶⁴⁵ See section 8.10 for an evaluation of Mane-Wheoki's claim.

⁶⁴⁶ Mane-Wheoki, 'Hotere – out the black window', 234.

04).⁶⁴⁷ Indeed, at the time of writing, if one relies on the (admittedly, potentially deceptive) criterion of numbers of works exhibited then there has yet to be a Hotere exhibition more extensive than the national touring show *Ralph Hotere, A survey 1963-73* (1974-75), which included sixty three separate works and which was presented in nine of its intended ten, national venues. Finally, it may be noted that neither Hotere nor McCahon has been subject of a *catalogue raisonné*.⁶⁴⁸

Stewart's 'I Do, Ralph Hotere And Constructive Silence' reiterates the ambiguities present in the aforementioned articles by O'Brien and Mane-Wheoki – albeit, with a notably higher rhetorical temperature. Stewart begins with the now-familiar justification of Hotere's reticence on the basis that, (1) Hotere speaks fully in the work, and (2), in and of itself, the work fully speaks for itself:

Ralph Hotere doesn't say much, at least with his tongue. He prefers to leave comment to his work, art which is supremely eloquent, accentuating his silence and the plea that silence makes for the primacy of art over theory.⁶⁴⁹

Stewart's overt privileging of 'art over theory' is further evident in his insistence that Hotere's work 'highlights the impotence of any words we may have' and 'thrives without

⁶⁴⁷ According to Auckland City Art Gallery, *Colin McCahon, Gates and Journeys*, 6, 79-95, this exhibition featured in all four main New Zealand centres as well as the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. It included one hundred and thirty nine works in its Auckland City Art Gallery incarnation, reduced to about fifty works in other venues. Similarly, as detailed in Bloem and Browne, *Colin McCahon: a question of faith*, 4, 265-68, this exhibition was presented at the Dutch Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Australian venues such as the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, as well as New Zealand's City Gallery, Wellington and Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. *Colin McCahon: a question of faith* presented some seventy eight works.

⁶⁴⁸ As recounted in Stephen Stratford, 'Hogging Colin', *Metro*, n117, March 1991, 74-84, in 1990 the Australian writer Murray Bail proposed a *catalogue raisonné* of McCahon's *oeuvre*. In the event, the project foundered in the face of objections from the McCahon family and Auckland City Art Gallery. In Wedde 'Figure it Out', 182, it is observed that, with the support of Dunedin Public Art Gallery and the Hotere Foundation Trust, Baker is engaged in the creation of a catalogue of Hotere's 'complete oeuvre, on a model similar to the McCahon database' (i.e., presumably, the *Colin McCahon Online Catalogue*).

⁶⁴⁹ Stewart, 'I Do, Ralph Hotere And Constructive Silence' in Taberner and Brownson, *Hotere, Seminar Papers from Into the Black*, 5.

literary midwifery', thereby transcending 'the inevitable discussions which yammer around all art.'⁶⁵⁰ The degree to which Stewart invests in the notion of the autonomy of the artwork reiterates an irony observed previously (see n503) – namely, that this prioritisation precisely employs the resources of spoken and written language in order to advance the notion that Hotere's work is 'inexplicable in words'. To this extent, Stewart's seminar piece constitutes and perpetrates the very praxis that, ostensibly, it opposes.

In relation to the idea that Hotere's reticence is implicated in discursive silence, Stewart suggests (in a tone much less conciliatory than either O'Brien or Mane-Wheoki) that

Hotere's silence in the preening, posturing cacophony of the contemporary artworld... is a dissonance which has unsettled the clamouring crowd to such an extent that they have been frightened away from his work.⁶⁵¹

and

This academic and intellectual silence matches Hotere's and is a consequence of it, for Hotere's silence denies the easy theological foundation of the artist's articulated philosophy, and so it denies the theorists a starting point.⁶⁵²

In suggesting that 'Hotere's silence denies... theorists... the easy theological foundation of the artist's articulated philosophy', Stewart would seem to be directing his criticism towards arts discourse that genuflects in the direction of the authority of the artist-individual. That is to say, discourse that prioritises the individual art subject insofar as it responds to or orients itself in accordance with the perceived expressions and wishes of the artist-individual. In Hotere's case, this privileging would appear to manifest negatively: discursive silence mimicking the silence of the artist-individual. If this was, in

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid, 7, 10.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid, 5.

⁶⁵² Ibid, 6.

fact, Stewart's intent then his commentary would be in harmony with the impetus of the present study. However, given Stewart's pronounced hostility to 'theory' or 'literary midwifery', this interpretation is precluded. On the contrary, insofar as Stewart *valourises* the manner by which Hotere's reticence effects discursive silence he is, precisely, engaged in privileging the individual art subject called 'Hotere'.

To this extent, Stewart's exposition is marked by the same ambiguities that appear in the writing of O'Brien and Mane-Wheoki – namely, that the discursive silence on Hotere and his work is, at once, an occasion for validating Hotere's individual authority *and* criticising a national arts establishment considered to have been deficient in meeting its obligations. Indeed, Stewart contends that 'our art theologians have grafted their rituals onto a cavalcade of lesser artists' than Hotere and even goes so far as to claim that 'the arrival of *Hotere Out The Black Window* shocked a significant sector or the art establishment into attempting to ignore it.'⁶⁵³ Still further, Stewart issues the condemnatory judgement that

⁶⁵³ Ibid, 5-6. Whilst Stewart does not qualify this assertion, one may speculate that he is alluding to the controversial decision by the arts board of Creative New Zealand to decline funding support for *Hotere – out the black window*. Here, it may be noted that an important element of the controversy in question was Stewart's own opinion piece, 'Funding decision is an artistic travesty'. In this article, Stewart expresses his conviction that 'It would be difficult to imagine anything as important in our recent cultural history' as *Hotere – out the black window* – a collaboration between 'our greatest living painter' and 'four of our greatest contemporary poets.' On this basis, Stewart characterises the funding decision as, variously, 'fundamentally at odds with Creative New Zealand's statutory obligations and strategic plan', 'indefensible', 'a monumental injustice', and even 'bureaucratic sabotage'. In response to Stewart's criticism, the chair of the arts board of Creative New Zealand, Claudia Scott, presented a public reply in the form of 'Funds for Hotere tour never sought', *Sunday Star-Times*, 8 June 1997, F2. Here, Scott points out that 'Creative NZ considered an application by the City Gallery (not by the artist) to support an exhibition of Hotere's work in Wellington. We were not asked to support a tour.' Scott, further, defends the funding decision on the basis that 'the exhibition and accompanying publication were clearly going to happen' and, hence, the rejection of the funding application reflected the necessity to 'give priority to projects where our funding will make a difference.' From the perspective of the present study, the relative merits of the arguments presented by Stewart and Scott are of lesser importance than the paradox they evince – namely, that Hotere, despite his unquestioned status as one of New Zealand's greatest artists, also is, apparently, neglected.

In our imitative Western Atlantic fine arts culture of commentary, curatory, and canon, it is amazing that this is the first serious Hotere retrospective, and the supporting publication is the only substantial script on forty years of authoritative artmaking.⁶⁵⁴

At the time Stewart's essay was written, O'Brien's book was, indeed, the 'only substantial script' on Hotere's work. However, in view of the precedent set by *Ralph Hotere, A survey 1963-73*, the claim that *Hotere – out the black window* is the 'first serious Hotere retrospective' is incorrect. This error is compounded by the fact that, whilst Stewart supplies a Bibliography, his many assertions of fact and opinion are unsubstantiated by footnotes or other references. Given Stewart's strong distaste of 'theory' or 'literary midwifery', that he eschews the finer points of scholarly convention is, perhaps, unsurprising. Nevertheless, I would suggest that, in disdaining scholarly balance and moderation in favour of the presentation of a pronounced polemic, ironically, Stewart's seminar piece risks being taken as an example of the very 'posturing cacophony' it denounces.

Let us summarise the preceding discussion in order to clarify what the writing of O'Brien, Mane-Wheoki, and Stewart implies for considerations of the *point de capiton* 'Hotere's reticence'. Here, it would appear that, certain ambiguities and contradictions notwithstanding, all three writers invest in the idea that Hotere, in being reticent, has discouraged critical discourse and, thereby, effected discursive silence. Insofar as Hotere's reticence is considered to be *effective*, it is not presented as pure passivity but rather admits consideration as an active element 'resounding' through the discourse with the force of a command. From this perspective, Hotere's reticence testifies to a contradictory 'speaking' by virtue of 'not speaking' and, to this extent, the discursive silence in question invites interpretation as a product of Hotere's *eloquent reticence* or, equivalently, Hotere's adherence to a *praxis of silent speech*. Immediately, the question arises as to the ostensive purpose of this praxis. That is to say, how is the praxis to be explained or justified? At first glance, the answer would appear to be that the *work* be permitted to speak or, better perhaps, the orchestration of a state of affairs in which the

⁶⁵⁴ Stewart, 'I Do, Ralph Hotere And Constructive Silence', 6.

‘speaking of the work’ (i.e., its being and meaning) may be clearly apprehended. In Hotere discourse, the level of investment in this praxis is evident from the continual rhetoric insisting on the formal autonomy of Hotere’s work and the resistance to analysis this work presents.

By way of emphasising this point, let us briefly revisit some of the statements in question. Thus, in relation to Hotere’s *Black Paintings* of 1969, McNamara suggests that they possess ‘a quiet, calm beauty that defies analysis’ and ‘exist in their own right as objects of great beauty.’⁶⁵⁵ With regard to the *Malady* series of 1970, Collier asserts that ‘The principal thing about almost all the pictures is that nothing is overt, nothing is proclaimed’ and ‘The way a painting interacts with the spectator’s power of sight is a complex business and best left so.’⁶⁵⁶ Writing on Hotere’s *Port Chalmers Paintings* of 1972, Middleditch speculates that ‘There seems to be something aggressive in this series, something that says “Keep out.” I suppose outsiders will never quite get under the surface’.⁶⁵⁷ As noted in Hall’s essay for the *Waikato Art Gallery Bulletin*, Hotere, himself, asserts ‘ “If you have to do something on me, fill it with photos of my work. They say all that really needs to be said.” ’⁶⁵⁸ Discussing the works employing stainless exhibited in 1983, Leech concludes: ‘The work of course speaks for itself; and in this exhibition it speaks very clearly in Hotere’s style.’⁶⁵⁹ Reflecting on Hotere’s *Black Paintings* of 1968, Pound observes that ‘Not only do Hotere’s early black paintings negate speech inside themselves... They make respondent speech difficult’ and, furthermore, ‘while refusing entry to the poets, Hotere’s early black paintings are *absolute poetry*... poetic to a degree disallowed by the literal presence of poetic texts.’⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁵ McNamara, ‘Austerity Can Be Exquisite’.

⁶⁵⁶ Collier, ‘Reviews’, 419.

⁶⁵⁷ Middleditch, ‘Powerful Hotere Paintings Compel Viewers’ Attention’.

⁶⁵⁸ Hotere quoted and paraphrased in Hall.

⁶⁵⁹ Leech, ‘Style and Change’.

⁶⁶⁰ Pound, ‘Tiger Country’, 17.

Finally, in Stewart's polemic, one finds the insistence that Hotere's work 'is supremely eloquent, accentuating... [Hotere's] silence and the plea that silence makes for the primacy of art over theory' and, still further, that Hotere's work 'highlights the impotence of any words we may have' and 'thrives without literary midwifery'.⁶⁶¹

The suggestion that Hotere's eloquent reticence or praxis of silent speech aims to make apprehensible the 'speaking' or, rather, being and meaning of the work admits an equivalent formulation. Namely, that, in silencing (part of) the field of subjectivity or effecting a suspension of prejudices and preconceptions, the praxis in question enlivens the possibility of an experience of the work that is primary, immediate, genuine, original, essential, authentic, and so forth. To this extent, Hotere's praxis of silent speech parallels McCahon's praxis of questioning: in both cases, the praxes are intended to facilitate experiences that are real and true. Moreover, the dimension of faith enters the equation insofar as, in either case, there is no objective guarantee that the praxes in question will be efficacious. It is not possible to know in advance that a praxis of questioning will be of efficacy in attaining knowledge and truth (or, as Curnow would have it, knowledges and truths). Similarly, it is not possible to know in advance that a praxis of silent speech will be of efficacy in attaining a true and real experience of the artwork. In either event, by necessity, the praxes in question demand a radically contingent affirmation or leap of faith. Hence, in the same way that McCahon's paradoxical *vision of doubt* admits consideration as an expression of *faith in and as a praxis of questioning* so, too, does Hotere's contradictory *eloquent reticence* admit consideration as an expression of *faith in and as a praxis of silent speech*.

Here, it should be emphasised that the ostensive aim of these *praxes of contradiction* – namely, the revelation of the reality and truth of the being and meaning of art subjects and art objects – is, precisely, of the order of the imaginary idealisations and rationalisations of consciousness. Always already, the fact that there *is* a *praxis* – which is to say, *repetition* – is symptomatic of the structure of desiring subjectivity. That is to

⁶⁶¹ Stewart, 'I Do, Ralph Hotere And Constructive Silence', 5, 7, 10.

say, as praxes of contradiction, the figures of McCahon's questioning faith and Hotere's effecting discursive silence are commensurate with the insistent return of the repressed, lettering/tracing/differencing, or figuring of desire that (as Lacan puts it in *Seminar VIII*) bears witness to 'the blind presence of... unnamed, blind desire', paradoxically fulfilled in endlessly missing its aim. Hence, investing in or performing praxes, precisely, defines consciousness as automatism/metonymy/repetition such that *to be conscious is to be repeating*; the conscious one makes meaning only insofar as this meaning is made *again*. To recall the point made earlier, in relation to Butler's comment regarding the 'pure act' of the 'decision to believe', strictly speaking, the 'investment in' or 'performance of' praxes of questioning or silent speech reflects the manner by which the conscious one *is as continually being given* to invest in and perform the praxes in question and, therefore, *is as continually being given* to believe in their efficacy. Given that the praxes lack any objective justification, this also is to say that the conscious one *is as continually being given* to make radically contingent affirmations or leaps of faith and, therefore, *is as continually being given* to posit an endless series of signifying alternatives or imaginary surrogates for the ineffable *objet petit a*. Thus, the challenge confronting the 'one that is conscious' is to negotiate the tension obtaining between the idealisations and rationalisations of consciousness (which would tend to, precipitately and prematurely, determine or close the field of meaning) and the insistence of ineffable subjective desire that seeks only its own perpetuation (i.e., that which would tend to render the field of meaning fundamentally indeterminate or open). As noted in the thesis Introduction, this challenge is, precisely, to be *in* and *as* traversing the fundamental fantasies of the 'one that is conscious' and the 'subject supposed to know' such that the attainment of one's fantasised self-realisation or one's fantasy objects is indefinitely deferred. In the process, 'unnamed, blind desire' is sublimated into named, directed drive (however radically contingent, idealised and rationalised this naming and directing may be), and 'one' finds satisfaction in being as a subject endlessly in becoming or as an analyst forever as arriving.

Conclusion

This thesis has generated some new perspectives on and potentials for the practice of art history and art criticism in Aotearoa/New Zealand through an *intervening in* and *interweaving of* the discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere, the philosophy of art, and Lacanian psychoanalysis. In so doing, this project has initiated the first, comprehensive, interdisciplinary conversation between Lacanian theory and that part of arts discourse in Aotearoa/New Zealand addressing McCahon and Hotere. By way of presenting some final words in this thesis (which are, it is to be hoped, the first words in a discourse to follow), let us, briefly, summarise the main gestures of this conversation. In the first part of this study, then, I explored the ambiguous and contradictory nature of the subjectivity expressed in the written paintings *Victory over Death 2*, *Painting from "Malady"*, and related works in order to demonstrate the efficacy of conceiving of this subjectivity in terms of the tension obtaining between the individual 'one that is conscious' and the *transindividual Otherness* of language-mediated, social and cultural reality, the greater part of which is, practically speaking, repressed from the perspective of the conscious one and, therefore, unconscious. In the process, I elaborated a model of subjectivity/meaning-making that (1) unsettles the metaphysical thinking invested in making absolute distinctions between self and Other, (2) resists making clear-cut differences between painting and writing, and (3) understands expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making (i.e., painting – and the writing and testimony surrounding painting) in terms of the agent-like, metaphoric precipitation and automatist, metonymic perpetuation of symptomatic formations, figures of discourse, or *points de capiton*.

The second part of the thesis applied this preliminary understanding to painting, considered as a sign or expression of subjectivity/meaning-making, in order to address two, key questions: *how does the meaning of painting come into being?* and *how is the meaning of painting sustained?* In this regard, the expression *figuring of painting* was employed to define the investigation of the agent-like, metaphoric function implicated in the precipitation of *points de capiton* in painting, whilst the term *desire of painting* served to designate the elaboration of the automatist, metonymic function enabling the

perpetuation of *points de capiton* in painting. The novel formulation *figuring of desire* was introduced in order to define the reciprocity of metaphoric and metonymic functions in language-mediated expressions of subjectivity. In the course of these deliberations, I drew upon a range of Lacanian texts (including some, as yet, little discussed *Seminar* – notably, *Seminar IX*, where Lacan presents a topological model of subjectivity), presenting interpretations of various, instrumental Lacanianisms – specifically, the ‘materiality’ and ‘agency’ of the ‘letter’ considered as the ‘essence of the signifier’ or ‘unary trait’, the ‘real-as-impossible’, synonymous with, yet inassimilable to, the function of representation/symbolisation, and the ‘formalisation of fantasy’: $\$ \diamond a$. On the basis of this discussion, I have sought to clarify how the Lacanian model of subjectivity/meaning-making may be efficaciously conceived in terms of a structurally necessary counterpoise of possibility and impossibility – unconscious metonymy becoming as conscious metonymy defining the order of the possible ($\$$), and the metaphoric function of pure difference implicated in this becoming defining the order of the real-as-impossible (the ‘cut’ or lettering/tracing/differencing of a).

In the third part of the thesis, this understanding has been applied to the discourse comprising paintings by McCahon and Hotere, and related writing and testimony, in order to interrogate this discourse from the perspective of two *points de capiton* – the various complexities and contradictions of which have been subsumed under the headings ‘McCahon’s doubt’ and ‘Hotere’s reticence’. The thesis has shown, firstly, how these two figures engender the possibility of interpreting McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse, respectively, in terms of repeated characterisations of McCahon as a visionary *and* a doubter (or, indeed, as a visionary insofar *as* he doubts, on which basis one confronts the contradictory figure of McCahon’s *vision of doubt*) and of Hotere as eloquent *and* reticent (or, indeed, as eloquent insofar *as* he is reticent, on which basis one confronts the paradoxical figure of Hotere’s *eloquent reticence*). Secondly, this study also has demonstrated that, to the extent McCahon discourse and Hotere discourse are conceivable as discourses of desire, defined in terms of fixations on symptomatic formations, they also are expressions of radically contingent affirmations of, or leaps of faith in, *praxes of contradiction*. I have suggested that, by virtue of these praxes, the

discourses in question sustain fantasies of the revelation of the reality and truth of the being and meaning of art subjects and art objects. The impossibility of objectively realising these fantasies (i.e., of realising *objet petit a* as an object in consciousness) testifies to the status of subjective desire as that which seeks only its own perpetuation or that finds fulfilment in endlessly missing its aim.

Here, I should reaffirm that, underlying these investigations, the thesis has been concerned about the very possibility of being as an agent in the world, of making meaning, of performing scholarship. To this extent, the discursive possibilities this project has enlivened, and the limits within which these possibilities have been defined, have embraced the Lacanian contention that, in a logico-structural *and* an ethical sense, the ‘psychoanalytic act’ or ‘end’ of analysis necessitates ‘traversing fantasy’. In the first place, this implies that the thesis has proceeded in light of the understanding that, always already, ‘I’, in becoming (as a subject, an analyst, a scholar), catalyse Other traversing of fantasy (i.e., enliven the possibility of assuming new perspectives in and of the discourse) only insofar as ‘I’ am being catalysed by the Other in traversing the fantasy *I am given to speak/desire* (i.e., the ‘I’ becoming by virtue of *writing* the thesis is, at the same time, *being written* by the discourse of the Other in which the thesis sits). Secondly, with particular regard to the arts discourse surrounding McCahon and Hotere, the thesis has traversed the fantasies of the traditionalising mode of art history as enshrined in the privileging of ‘ones that are conscious’ and the ‘subject supposed to know’. In the former case, this study has challenged the tendency, in seeking to determine the being and meaning of the artwork, to make the artist-individual the exemplary point of reference and, in so doing, to reify questionable notions of originality, authority, and genius. In the latter event, this project has challenged the (often unspoken) investment in the ideal of total knowledge, incontestable truth, and final meaning – as evinced in the tendency to advance explanations that are excessively totalising, reductive, or simplistic.

In practical terms, this means that the thesis has been less about presenting ‘primary’ research or deriving quantifiable results and more about enlivening and exploring possibilities – in particular, the possibility of assuming certain perspectives on a

discourse or a world of meaning, and questioning the exigencies and limits of these endeavours. To this extent, this study embraces the understanding that there are no final answers to those questions concerned with the reality and truth of the being and meaning of art subjects and art objects. Indeed, the very idea of there being objectively ‘real’ (which is to say, stable, enduring, substantial, material) entities of this kind is, in Lacanian terms, an imagining of the imaginary. However, this is not to say that the thesis presents an apology for relativism or idealism – both of which bear witness to an investment in fantasy insofar as they fixate on *determinate* positions: relativism tending to deny, absolutely, the possibility of making truth; idealism tending to deny, absolutely, the possibility of knowing (material) reality. On the contrary, ‘I’ who *must* be where ‘it’ was, who *must* become through the ‘term’ of analysis, is challenged to confront and relinquish the fixation on privileged fantasy objects (e.g., that which would offer to provide the final answer or reveal the ultimate truth of the being and meaning of art subjects and art objects) and to invest in the mode of *being in and as traversing fantasy*. In the process, ‘unnamed, blind desire’ (that seeks only its own perpetuation) is sublimated into named, directed drive – albeit, a ‘direction’ that, by virtue of investing in the very *activity* or *movement* of analysis, interpretation, meaning making, leaves its object(ive) indefinitely suspended or deferred.

Appendices

8.1 Barrie, Zepke, and the question of Lacanian phallogocentrism

8.1.1 Barrie

Barrie's 'Remissions' and 'Deferrals' evince two themes that are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, in the broadest sense, Barrie's writing may be situated within that part of the feminist project seeking to define and promote a specifically feminine mode of subjectivity in order to subvert entrenched and inequitable constructions of gender and difference in Western patriarchy. Thus, in 'Remissions', Barrie aligns herself with the 'new [F]rench feminisms' (citing writing by Cixous and Irigaray, in particular) whose 'revolutionary dimension... lies in their insistence upon the specificity of feminine unconscious', in their

...call for the creation of a specifically women's language and writing, informed by the feminine unconscious, to speak the female body through the cracks in the syntax, semantics and logic of male language...

and in their 'SUBVERSION of... the EXISTING phallogocentric order'.⁶⁶²

Secondly, Barrie's primary theoretical resource is Derridean deconstruction, which she wields against aspects of Lacanian theory she considers unhelpful to the feminist project. In 'Remissions' this criticism is implicit in her suggestion that

...what we perceive as the 'real' becomes merely a manifestation of the symbolic order as constituted to privilege men. Only by deconstructing this phallogocentrism, can we transform the 'real' in a fundamental way.⁶⁶³

This quotation conveys well the density of the specialist jargon Barrie employs – and her tendency, apparently, to take for granted the familiarity of her readers with this terminology. Compounding this happenstance, Barrie also mistakenly conflates the

⁶⁶² Barrie, 'Remissions', 14, 18.

⁶⁶³ Ibid, 14.

Lacanian order of the ‘real’ with the Lacanian order of the ‘symbolic’ (i.e., language-mediated, social and cultural ‘reality’).⁶⁶⁴ ‘Phallogocentrism’ (a contraction of ‘phallogocentrism’ and ‘logocentrism’) is a neologism Derrida employs, in ‘The Purveyor of Truth’ (1975), in order to critique the apparent investment of Lacanian psychoanalysis in ‘The *transcendental* position of the phallus... in the chain of signifiers to which it belongs, while simultaneously making it possible’.⁶⁶⁵ That is to say, in Derridean terms, the Lacanian phallus is a ‘transcendental signified’ (i.e., a transcendental and absolute standard of truth and meaning) in a ‘logocentric’ system of thought (i.e., a system of thought that, in the final analysis, re-presents the truth *as* presence).⁶⁶⁶

In ‘Deferrals’, Barrie’s criticism of Lacanian theory is more explicit. By way of a direct (albeit, selective) engagement with *Seminar XX*, Barrie allows that ‘Lacan’s structuralist analysis... [of Freudian theory] was of enormous value to French feminists, because it located the nature of women’s repression in language itself’. Nevertheless, Barrie also contends that ‘Lacan... imposed a closure. He sealed women’s fate as an irreversible process.’⁶⁶⁷ This conclusion reflects Barrie’s understanding that, in Lacanian theory, ‘woman lacks a relation to the phallus’ and, in consequence, ‘she has no position to speak from. She is “outside the symbolic” which structures the unconscious.’ Still further, as ‘Excluded from language, woman is thus deprived of a subjectivity of her own and a desire of her own... She inhabits absence within this phallogocentric discourse and is forced into silence.’⁶⁶⁸ By way of substantiating her commentary, Barrie cites (with some editorial emendations) the following passages from Lacan’s *Seminar XX*: ‘ “there is woman only as excluded by the nature of things, which is the nature of words” ’ and

⁶⁶⁴ For further explanation of the Lacanian orders, see the thesis Prologue.

⁶⁶⁵ Derrida, ‘The Purveyor of Truth’ in *The Post Card* (originally published as ‘Le facteur de la vérité’ in *Poétique, revue de théorie et d’analyse littéraires*, n21, 1975, 96-147), 477.

⁶⁶⁶ For further explanation of the terms ‘transcendental signified’ and ‘logocentrism’, see section 8.2.

⁶⁶⁷ Barrie, ‘Deferrals’, 4.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 3-4.

‘ “women... don’t know what they’re saying which is the whole difference between them and me.” ’⁶⁶⁹ That Barrie considers deconstruction to offer the possibility of ameliorating this state of affairs is evident from her assertion that ‘Feminist deconstructions using Derridean methods are POST-structuralist precisely because they demonstrate that the binary oppositional structures which create women’s fate, can be displaced and (re) inscribed in a different way.’⁶⁷⁰

8.1.2 Zepke

I would point out that, in general, I agree with the rebuttal of Barrie presented in Zepke’s ‘Repetitions’ and, indeed, consider his essay to exhibit a sounder grasp of theory than either of Barrie’s articles. Nevertheless, Zepke’s piece exhibits some of the very issues he criticises in Barrie’s work. A case in point is Zepke’s contention that Barrie fails to acknowledge the significant differences distinguishing the thinking of Kristeva and Irigaray, and, thereby, indulges in a ‘project of HOMOGEnising Kristeva and Irigaray... under the banner of “new French feminism”’. ⁶⁷¹ In support of this claim, Zepke observes that ‘Over both... [Barrie’s] articles Kristeva is specifically mentioned four times and never quoted... The quotations Barrie uses to illustrate the claims of “new French feminists” come exclusively from Cixous and Irigaray.’⁶⁷² Whilst Zepke’s point is, substantially, correct, nevertheless, he fails to recognise the quotation of Kristeva in Barrie’s ‘Remissions’, where there is reference to ‘what Kristeva calls the “not that” and the “not yet” ’ – albeit, by way of an insufficiently detailed reference to a translation of Kristeva’s writing in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds), *New French*

⁶⁶⁹ Lacan, ‘God and the Jouissance of ~~The~~ Woman’ in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds), *Feminine Sexuality, Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), 144, cited in Barrie, ‘Deferrals’, 3-4.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid, 4.

⁶⁷¹ Zepke, ‘Repetitions’, 44.

⁶⁷² Ibid, 42-43.

Feminisms: an Anthology (1981).⁶⁷³ Moreover, Zepke's presentation of Kristeva's ideas also lacks exegetical rigour. The discussion of Kristeva's thought is, largely, unreferenced – the two references Zepke *does* include addressing Kristeva at one remove by way of Elizabeth Grosz's *Sexual Subversions: three French Feminists* (1989). Even here, Zepke's essay is marked by imprecision, erroneously misrepresenting Grosz's text as '*Sexual Submission*'.⁶⁷⁴

These problems notwithstanding, in my view, Zepke's 'Repetitions' rightly finds each of the aforementioned currents in Barrie's work to be deeply problematic. In the former case, Zepke contests Barrie's appeals to Derridean deconstruction in support of her effort to reify a '“feminine difference”... inscribed “outside” of “patriarchally determined dichotomies”', thereby enlivening '“the possibility of an as-yet unknown and unimaginable conception of woman”' existing 'outside the “old hierarchical terms” with a “new, dephallicized meaning”'.⁶⁷⁵ In Zepke's view, this demonstrates how Barrie's project sustains a 'logocentric conceptualisation of inside/outside' and, indeed, in seeking to use Derrida's writing as the 'received wisdom... [of] a... voice of authority' recapitulates 'the very logocentrism she tries to deconstruct.'⁶⁷⁶ In the latter event, Zepke contends that a fundamental misreading of Lacanian theory underpins Barrie's 'accusations that Lacan's phallogocentric symbolic order excludes women from an authentic subjectivity, and so forces them into silence' and her insistence that 'women are silenced by the “lack” of a relation to the phallus'.⁶⁷⁷ Specifically, Zepke suggests that Barrie reiterates Derrida's conflation of penis and phallus perpetrated in 'The Purveyor of

⁶⁷³ See Barrie, 'Remissions', 14, 18 (n2, n6).

⁶⁷⁴ See Zepke, 'Repetitions', 43, n4.

⁶⁷⁵ Barrie, 'Remissions', 13, and *ibid*, 'Deferrals', 4, paraphrased in Zepke, 'Repetitions', 47. I would point out that Zepke takes some liberties with Barrie's text. In 'Remissions', Barrie refers to 'sexual “difference”' and 'the problem of thinking outside the patriarchally determined dichotomies', whilst in 'Deferrals', Barrie refers to 'Both sexes' being 'dephallogocentrized' and, therefore, being able to 'take new meanings'.

⁶⁷⁶ Zepke, 'Repetitions', 47, 49.

⁶⁷⁷ Barrie, 'Deferrals', 3-4, paraphrased in Zepke, 'Repetitions', 51.

Truth'.⁶⁷⁸ In so doing, Barrie locates the phallus *within* the logocentric dichotomy of presence/absence, surplus/lack instead of appreciating its status as that which enlivens the very possibility of there being a dichotomy. In other words, Barrie speaks of *the phallus* in terms of 'that' which one has or doesn't have, as opposed to *the phallic function* that enlivens the very possibility of there being a difference between 'having' and 'not having'. In so doing, Zepke maintains that Barrie misunderstands the role played by the phallus or phallic function in Lacanian theory as that which is implicated in the emergence of gendered subjectivity whilst being, in itself, so to speak, 'non-gendered and non-privileging .' In consequence, Zepke insists, contrary to Barrie, that it is *not* the case that 'women are silenced by the "lack" of a relation to the phallus' – on the contrary, 'it is precisely their relation to the phallus which allows them to speak at all.'⁶⁷⁹

8.1.3 Lacanian phallogocentrism

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the aforementioned 'phallus' or 'phallic function' is implicated in the emergence of gendered subjectivity and, to this extent, has aroused controversy. In particular, for some feminist scholars (among whom one would include Barrie), this term exposes Lacanian theory as inherently sexist and patriarchal. Whilst I do not entirely agree with these assessments, I would concede that, given its cultural associations, the word 'phallus' is problematic. Insofar as the present study has been concerned less with the genesis of (gendered) subjectivity *per se* than with the analysis of expressions of subjectivity *in discourse*, there have been only fleeting references to the phallus. Nevertheless, given that Lacanian theory often has been invoked *and* criticised within the frame of feminism, the term 'phallus' demands clarification. Thus, in *Seminar V*, the term 'phallus' is employed to designate the 'primordially lost... metonymical... object of desire' that is 'caught up in a function which is that of the signifier' and which is 'pivotal... central... in the whole dialectic... purely and simply of all subjective

⁶⁷⁸ Zepke, 'Repetitions', 51. In support of this claim, Zepke cites Derrida, 'The Purveyor of Truth', 439, where reference is made to 'woman as the unveiled site of the lack of a penis, as the truth of the phallus, that is, of castration.'

⁶⁷⁹ Zepke, 'Repetitions', 51.

development.’⁶⁸⁰ Lacan’s reference to the phallus as the ‘primordially lost... metonymical... object of desire’ is addressed in chapter four. Here, it suffices to say that the phallus, so conceived, designates an excluded ‘primordial signifier’, by virtue of which subjectivity is as constitutively lacking (i.e., desiring, becoming). However, of more immediate relevance, in the present context, is the ‘pivotal... central’ role Lacan accords the phallus or phallic function in the ‘development’ of language-mediated subjectivity. These inferences are amplified in ‘The Signification of the Phallus’ (1958), where Lacan insists that ‘the phallus is not a fantasy... as an imaginary effect. Nor is it as such an object... Still less is it the organ – penis or clitoris – that it symbolizes.’ On the contrary, ‘the phallus is a signifier... the signifier that is destined to designate meaning effects as a whole, insofar as the signifier conditions them by its presence as signifier.’⁶⁸¹ However, of obvious interest to feminist scholars concerned with questions of gender identity, Lacan also asserts:

The developments that appear in psychological genesis confirm the phallus’ signifying function...

...one can indicate the structures that govern the relations between the sexes by referring simply to the phallus’ function...⁶⁸²

That Barrie’s reading of Lacan’s text (in common with those of other, Anglophone, feminist writers) may lack depth and balance is suggested by Suzanne Barnard’s ‘Introduction’ to *Reading Seminar XX, Lacan’s Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality* (2002). Here, Barnard alludes to the over-dependence of ‘English-language scholarship’ on the brace of chapters from *Seminar XX* presented in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds), *Feminine Sexuality, Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne* (1982), and points out that delays in the availability of a complete, ‘English-

⁶⁸⁰ Lacan, *Seminar V*, Seminar 1, 6 November 1957, 5, and Seminar 12, 5 February 1958, 166.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid, ‘The Signification of the Phallus’ in *Écrits* (2006) (originally presented in the form of a lecture at the Max Planck Society, Munich, 9 May 1958, and originally published in *Écrits* (1966)). 579.

⁶⁸² Ibid, 582.

language translation of *Seminar XX* have precipitated ‘its almost exclusive popularization as a text on sexual difference’.⁶⁸³ Indeed, Barnard suggests that, in condemning ‘the more scandalous sounding’ of Lacan’s remarks on femininity (and, here, Barnard reproduces, precisely, those passages Barrie selects) ‘as evidence of Lacan’s phallocentrism’, feminist scholarship misses ‘a serious and profoundly original attempt to go beyond both the patriarchal dimensions of Freud’s corpus and the banalities concerning feminine sexuality characteristic of neo-Freudian revisionism.’⁶⁸⁴ Still further, Barnard suggests that Anglophone feminism, insofar as it tends to mirror the focus of writers like Kristeva and Irigaray on ‘the relationships between sexual difference and epistemology, as well as between sexual difference, social structure and politics’, has insufficiently understood the status of the Lacanian real ‘as the traumatic cause on account of which any attempt to reduce sexual difference to biology, phenomenology, or cultural construction is doomed to fail.’⁶⁸⁵ This kind of misunderstanding would seem to flavour Barrie’s identification of the ‘“real”’ with ‘what we perceive as... a manifestation of the symbolic order’.

In contrast to Barrie, Zepke aligns himself with the pro-Lacanian in the debate surrounding the meaning and implications of the phallus or phallic function. Between Lacan’s defenders and detractors, the critical point of difference concerns the status of the phallic function either as that which is of efficacy merely in *describing* the emergence of gendered subjectivity in patriarchy or as that which, always already, is *complicit* with patriarchal privilege and prejudice in the very construction and elaboration of the theory in question. Exemplifying the pro-Lacanian position is Ragland-Sullivan who finds

...no a priori Lacanian support for phallocentrism – any more than for Lacanian-supported feminism. Lacan discovered the phallic signifier, its effects and the resulting structure of substitutive Desire. These intrinsically neutral elements give

⁶⁸³ Suzanne Barnard, ‘Introduction’ in Barnard and Fink (eds), *Reading Seminar XX, Lacan’s Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 1-2.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid, 2-3.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid, 4.

rise to ideologies of the masculine and feminine that cluster around the male-female difference and dramatize themselves in a parade.⁶⁸⁶

The anti-Lacanian position is summarised by Grosz, for whom

...the phallic signifier is *not*... neutral... The relation between the penis and phallus is not arbitrary, but socially and politically motivated... by the already existing structure of patriarchal power...⁶⁸⁷

Resolving this dilemma is beyond the scope of the thesis. However, I would suggest that attending to what, in the second part of the thesis Introduction, I refer to as the mode of *being in and as traversing fantasy* (or, in post-structuralist parlance, *being in and as deconstruction*) may provide a possible amelioration. Being in and as traversing fantasy implies that final determinations of meaning (which is to say, of subjectivity, subject positions) are endlessly deferred. The corollary of this indefinite suspension is that all determinations must remain in question, thereby being amenable to endless reformulation. Always already, then, any account of subjectivity in terms of the 'phallic function' must, as a structural *and* ethical necessity, place in question the terms of its derivation. I would suggest that, *in potentia*, Lacanian theory is open to this possibility. However, to what degree this possibility is realised remains a matter for debate.

⁶⁸⁶ Ragland-Sullivan, 298.

⁶⁸⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A feminist introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 124.

8.2 Lacan, Heidegger, and Derrida: comparisons and key ideas

Whilst this is not a project on Heidegger or Derrida *per se*, I should acknowledge that these writers have provided useful points of comparison and contrast for my explorations of Lacanian theory. With regard to Lacan and Heidegger, the consonances can be quite explicit: in his *Écrits* and *Seminar*, Lacan regularly refers to Heidegger and appropriates Heideggerian terms. Whilst important differences obtain between Heideggerian and Lacanian thought, one might suggest that Lacan's conception of an *ex-centric* subjectivity (i.e., a subjectivity that exceeds and eludes distinctions between that which is inside and outside the *one*) resonates with Heidegger's conception of 'ek-sistence' (or 'ex-sistence') and *ekstasis*. Similarly, it may be suggested that the Lacanian unconscious, understood as a field of meaning *in potentia*, bears comparison with Heidegger's conception of the subject (for which Heidegger employs the word *Dasein*) in terms of potentials and possibilities.⁶⁸⁸

In the literature, Derrida and Lacan often are portrayed as intellectual antagonists. Whilst both writers present re-workings of Freudian psychoanalysis in light of the implications of structural linguistics, it should be acknowledged that significant differences in detail and in intent obtain between them. For example, whilst this is a gross simplification that, likely, obscures more than it reveals, one might say that if Derrida engages with *subjectivity as text* then Lacan addresses a *desiring subjectivity*. This state of affairs notwithstanding, throughout the thesis, I have found it useful to compare Lacan's various allusions to, variously, the 'subject of the unconscious', the 'letter' as the 'essence of the signifier', and the metaphoric function of pure difference proper to the operation of the 'unary trait' with Derrida's conception of the trace and *différance* – terms that merit further explanation below.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁸ For a general account of what Lacan takes from Heidegger, see, for example, Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy, Humanism, antihumanism and being* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 26-27, 56, 128. For a more in-depth analysis of the Heideggerian aspects of Lacan's thought, see Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, 133-45, and Casey and Woody, 76-88.

⁶⁸⁹ With regard to Lacan and Derrida, the 'lines of battle' are, typically, defined in relation to Lacan's 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"' and Derrida's response in 'The Purveyor of Truth'.

8.2.1 Other fantasies in the discursive field: ontotheology and logocentrism

By way of providing further clarification of what is implicit in the notion of ‘traversing the fundamental fantasy’, I would suggest that illuminating parallels may be drawn with Heidegger’s critique of ‘ontotheology’ and Derrida’s critique of ‘logocentrism’. That is to say, traversing the fantasies of the conscious one and the subject supposed to know is, to some degree, synonymous with traversing the fantasies (i.e., myths, prejudices, preconceptions, symptomatic formations, figures of discourse) inherent in discourses that may be termed ontotheological and logocentric. In making this comparison, I observe that, notwithstanding their differences in detail, Lacanian, Heideggerian, and Derridean theory all present challenges to what may be termed Western-style, metaphysical thinking. That is to say, a way of thinking reality in terms of substantial, material essences, first causes, or fundamental forces – or, more generally, perhaps, conceiving being and existence in terms of origins and essences, ends and absolutes.

What, then, is meant by ‘ontotheology’ and ‘logocentrism’? With regard to ontotheology, one of Heidegger’s clearest definitions may be found in the essay ‘Kant’s Thesis About Being’ (1961). Here, Heidegger asserts that in

...Occidental European thought... the question about being, taken as a question about the being of beings, is double in form. It asks on the one hand: What are beings, in general, as beings? Considerations within the province of this question come... under the heading of ontology. The question “What are beings?” includes also the question, “Which being is the highest and in what way is it?” The question is about the divine and God. The province of this question is called theology. The

A comprehensive consideration of the proximities and distances (intellectual and/or personal) between Derrida and Lacan is beyond the scope of the present study. However, for some balanced comparisons of Lacan and Derrida that acknowledge their points of difference *and* areas of compatibility, readers are referred to Hurst (see, especially, 1-13, 373-85), and Lewis (in particular, the concluding chapter ‘The real writing of Lacan: another writing’, 202-60).

duality of the question about the being of beings can be brought together in the title “onto-theo-logy.” The twofold question, What are beings? asks on the one hand, What are (in general) beings? The question asks on the other hand, What (which one) is the (ultimate) being?⁶⁹⁰

According to Heidegger’s definition, ontotheology presumes the potential closure or absolute determination of the field of meaning on the basis of a double appeal. Firstly, there is an investment in the idea that, in a given context, there is an irreducible element common to all beings therein – some defining feature they have *in general*. For example, if one defines the ‘context’ in question as an artist’s *oeuvre* then candidates for beings-in-common might be the name, signature, handiwork, personality, etc. of the artist (where, it may be noted, defining some of these features – e.g., ‘artistic personality’ – presents a, seemingly, insurmountable challenge). Secondly, there is an investment in the idea that there is an ultimate being serving as absolute, transcendental origin *and* end of a collection of particular beings. In the case of an artist’s *oeuvre*, invariably, this being is identified with the individual artist-creator. As an ultimate being, the artist-creator is solely, uniquely, and authentically responsible for originating and determining the purpose or meaning of their *oeuvre*. From an ontotheological standpoint, then, a painting (or collection of paintings) whose meaning is, in principle, fully determinable offers to represent (indeed, *re-presence*) this hypothetical common element and/or ultimate being. To this extent, ontotheological discourse tends to reify individual author-creators as first and final causes – which is also to say that, from the perspective of ontotheology, author-creators speak in original and originating voices as opposed to being spoken by what Lacan refers to as the ‘Other’ of language *per se*. Here, the implication is not merely that origination and meaning derive from beings-present. Rather, in ontotheology, the very possibility of origination and meaning proceeds by virtue of a metaphysical prejudice whereby *being means presence*.

⁶⁹⁰ Heidegger, ‘Kant’s Thesis About Being’ in William McNeill (ed), *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, originally presented 17 May 1961 and originally published in Erik Würtenberger and Maihofer Werner Wolf Thomas, *Existenz und Ordnung: Festschrift f. Erik Wolf zum 60. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1962), 217-45), 340. For further, illuminating discussion of Heidegger’s conception of ‘ontotheology’ see, for example, Iain Thomson, ‘Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger’s *Destruktion* of Metaphysics’ in *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, v8, i3, 2000, 297-327 (see, especially, 297-303).

To this extent, Heidegger's critique of ontotheology parallels Derrida's critique of logocentrism. As various commentators suggest, in a general sense, one may define as logocentric any system of thought that (1) invests in the idea of origins and essences, ends and absolutes of truth, meaning, and being, and (2) in making assertions of truth, meaning, and being, seeks to recover, represent, *re-presence* these origins and essences, ends and absolutes.⁶⁹¹ Thus, in *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida asserts that 'Logocentrism would thus support the determination of the being of the entity as presence' and writes of 'logocentric metaphysics, determining the sense of being as presence'.⁶⁹² Similarly, in the essay 'Structure, Sign and Play' (1966), Derrida writes:

The history of metaphysics... is the determination of Being as presence in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence – *eidos* [form, essence], *archē* [origin], *telos* [end, purpose], *energeia* [energy, power in action], *ousia* [substance] (essence, existence, substance, subject) *alētheia*

⁶⁹¹ See, for example, Michael Payne, *Reading Theory, An Introduction to Lacan, Derrida, and Kristeva* (Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 123, where it is asserted:

Deconstruction questions the dream of logocentrism, which is to make truth present in spoken discourse... Relentlessly, deconstruction challenges the question, "What is...?"... as a move against essentialism, a logocentric fiction of presence.

See also Niall Lucy, *A Derrida Dictionary* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 71, where it is observed that

...logocentrism... refers to the idea that, before everything else (history, knowledge, consciousness, etc.), there is presence. Before everything, there is the Logos, the undeconstructible origin of the meaning of being, the rationality of thought, the absolute interiority of truth.

As a final example, see Barry Stocker, *Derrida on Deconstruction* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 52, who suggests that

Logocentrism in Derrida refers to the philosophical tendency to find truth in the presentation of Being, Spirit, Consciousness, History across a philosophical system or any idea, mode of experience, emphasized in a philosophical system.

⁶⁹² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 12, 43.

[unconcealment, disclosure], transcendental, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.⁶⁹³

Thus, logocentrism invests in a metaphysics of presence insofar as presence is considered to be the ultimate criterion of truth, meaning, and being. The 'true' meaning of 'to be' is 'to be *present*'. That which is *present* truly is, entirely and self-sufficiently. However, as Niall Lucy points out, this presumption is false: always already, presence is, itself, secondary to what may be termed a 'structure of supplementarity'.⁶⁹⁴ That is to say, what

⁶⁹³ Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' in *Writing and Difference*, trans with an introduction and additional notes by Alan Bass (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2001 (1978), originally presented as 'La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines' on 21 October 1966 and originally published in *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967, 409-28), 353.

⁶⁹⁴ Lucy, 102 (see, also, 135-40 for a highly readable account of the notion of 'supplementarity'). Whilst this matter cannot be comprehensively addressed here, Lucy is alluding to Derrida's discussion of the 'logic of the supplement'. That is to say, the manner by which, always already, the determination of a being present is only possible on the basis of a vanishing of absolute distinctions between what is considered to be essential, original, inside and what is considered to be contextual, derivative, outside. From Derrida's perspective, always already it is the case that what is 'inside' or 'essential' to a determined object or meaning is neither an entirety nor a sufficiency but is, on the contrary, an original lack that demands supplementation by what is 'contextual' or 'outside'. To put the matter equivalently, in Derridean terms, there is *no* isolable origin, essence or interiority by virtue of which an object or meaning might be present entirely and sufficiently. Rather, always already it is the case that, interminably, the 'outside' is entering and supplementing the 'inside', thereby defining the 'inside' *as* 'inside'. In its *interminability*, supplementation is never complete – the 'inside' lack is never completely 'filled' and, in consequence, the absolute presence/determination of the object or meaning is indefinitely deferred.

For a reference to the logic of the supplement see, for example, Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 145, where it is asserted that

...the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. it intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void... As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence... its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something can be filled up *of itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself.

See also *ibid*, *Speech and Phenomena, And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, originally published as *La Voix et le Phénomène*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 88, where it is stated that

...what is supplementary is in reality *différance*, the operation of differing which at one and the same time both fissures and retards presence, submitting it simultaneously to primordial

is considered to be ‘intrinsic to’, ‘inside of’, ‘*present to*’ presence depends on a relation to that which is ‘extrinsic to’, ‘outside of’, ‘*absent from*’ presence. In other words, it is *not* the case that a full and positive presence secures the possibility of making absolute determinations of knowledge, truth and meaning. On the contrary (and in accordance with the insights of structural linguistics), it is only by virtue of negative relations of difference (in Derrida’s parlance, the operation of the ‘trace’ and ‘*différance*’) that there is enlivened the possibility of meaning-making *per se* – where, moreover, the endpoint of this process is an unrealisable ideal, indefinitely deferred.

8.2.2 Another Other: Derrida’s archive

With regard to considerations of subjectivity in its transindividual aspect, it may be suggested that certain resonances obtain between the Lacanian conception of the ‘big Other’, ‘symbolic order’, or ‘signifying chain’, and the psychoanalytically flavoured conception of the ‘archive’, as articulated in Derrida’s essay, ‘Archive Fever, A Freudian Impression’ (1995). For example, at the outset of his essay, Derrida discerns, in the etymology of the word ‘archive’, a ‘name’ that ‘coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history... where things *commence*... but also the principle according to the law... where men and gods *command*’, in relation to which there are expressed ‘two orders of order: *sequential* and *jussive*’.⁶⁹⁵ In the Lacanian parlance I employ in chapter two, these ‘two orders of order’ seem analogous to subjectivity

division and delay. *Différance* is to be conceived prior to the separation of between deferring as delay and differing as the active work of difference.

where, moreover (and, I would argue, in harmony with the Lacanian conception of the subject of the unconscious, the metaphoric function of pure difference, or the psychical function of repression), Derrida asserts that this operation of *différance*, fundamental to expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making is

...inconceivable if one begins on the basis of consciousness, that is, presence, or on the basis of its simple contrary, absence or nonconsciousness.

⁶⁹⁵ Derrida, ‘Archive Fever, A Freudian Impression’ (1995), trans Eric Prenowitz, in *Diacritics*, v25, n2, Summer 1995, 9.

conceived in terms of a metonymically ordered *structure* that is subject to metaphoric *structuring*.

Moreover, with reference to the Freudian conception of the death drive (see section 8.7), Derrida characterises the ‘jussive’ order of structuring as that which

...is at work, but since it always operates in silence, it never leaves any archives of its own. It destroys in advance its own archive, as if that were in truth the very motivation of its most proper movement. It works *to destroy the archive: on the condition of effacing* but also *with a view to effacing* its own “proper” traces – which consequently cannot properly be called “proper.”⁶⁹⁶

That is to say, in the context of Derrida’s thought, the ‘jussive’ dimension of the Freudian death drive is synonymous with the operation of the trace and *différance*. As previously noted, the thesis presents an understanding of this order of structuring in terms of a metaphoric function of pure difference proper to the operation of what Lacan terms, variously, the ‘letter’, the ‘essence of the signifier’, or the ‘unary trait’. Here, the instrumental point is that, thus conceived, the letter or unary trait is implicated in the generation and/or ordering of the field of meaning whilst, at the same time, fundamentally exceeding and eluding the terms of reference of that field.

Relevant, in this regard, is Derrida’s reference to the ‘decisive paradox’ by which, in contrast to ‘*anamnēsis*’ (i.e., remembrance of previous incarnations), ‘The archive is hypomnesic’ (i.e., in the manner of an auxiliary aid to memory, radically outside or other than memory, yet somehow necessary for the functioning of memory). This paradox implies that

...if there is no archive without consignation [i.e., deliverance into the charge or custody of an other]... in an *external place* which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive. And thus from destruction. Consequence: right on what permits and conditions

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid, 13-14.

archivization, we will never find anything other than what exposes to destruction... The archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself.⁶⁹⁷

In chapter four, I invoke Freud's conception of the 'compulsion to repeat' or the 'death instinct' in the context of a discussion of Lacan's elaboration of subjective desire as 'significant insistence'. Here, the critical point is that, paradoxically, the Freudian 'compulsion to repeat' or 'death instinct' defines the field of subjectivity as a structurally necessary counterpoise of possibility and impossibility: it is, simultaneously, that which enlivens the possibility of meaningful, subjective experience *and* that which, 'in itself' is impossible to represent/symbolise in subjective experience. As Derrida puts it:

The death drive is not a principle. It even threatens every principality... every archival desire. It is what we will call... *le mal d'archive, archive fever*.⁶⁹⁸

8.2.3 The transcendental signified

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida defines the transcendental signified as the absolute standard and guarantor of truth and meaning 'implied by all categories or all determined significations, by all lexicons and all syntax, and therefore by all linguistic signifiers, though not to be identified simply with any one of those signifiers'. The paradoxical status of the transcendental signified emerges in view of the fact that whilst it allows itself to be 'precomprehended' through each signifier (i.e., insofar as a signifier 'points' towards 'a' determinate meaning, there is presupposed an 'end' of meaning), it remains 'irreducible to all the epochal determinations that it nonetheless makes possible, thus opening the history of the logos, yet itself being only through the logos; that is, *being nothing* before the logos and outside of it.'⁶⁹⁹ The antinomy, to which Derrida refers, obtains insofar as these absolute concepts are considered to be entirely full and self-sufficient (i.e., in 'themselves' irreducible and, therefore, undifferentiated) and yet, on

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid, *Of Grammatology*, 20.

this very basis, precisely that which enables the possibility of there being any differentiation, derivation or representation – that is, any movement of meaning. Equivalently, one might say that transcendental signifieds are posited as being (1) only by virtue of, or in relation to, the system of meaning (i.e., appeals to transcendental signifieds are, by necessity, mediated by language) and yet (2) that which, by virtue of their utter priority and alterity *from* the system of meaning, *grounds* or secures the very possibility of there being any system of this kind.

Derrida's position (the subtleties of which are, here, necessarily, much abridged and simplified) is that there are no transcendental signifieds. The very idea is an 'illusion' of a 'history of truth' constructed on the basis of logocentric and metaphysical prejudices, where speech is misconstrued as the spontaneous expression of self-presence and, thereby, the truth of being.⁷⁰⁰ Instead, Derrida advocates the notion that 'From the moment there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We *think only in signs*.'⁷⁰¹ Hence, rather than positing a transcendental ground for truth and meaning (i.e., a position that is, at once, absolutely other than *and* condition of possibility for signification), Derrida repudiates the idea of the transcendental signified in favour of the notion of the 'limitlessness of play' of signs.⁷⁰² In other words, it is not only a matter of dispensing with conceptual absolutes – but, indeed, of redefining concepts *per se* as ideals that are, strictly speaking, unattainable or unrealisable. Derrida's argument, which is intrinsic to post-structuralism, is that the signified is, in practice, never fully determined or *made present*. Hence, in Derrida's words, the endless play of signs (i.e., movement of meaning associated with relations of difference among signifiers) implies 'the impossibility that a sign, the unity of signifier and signified, be produced within the plenitude of a present

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid, 50.

⁷⁰² Ibid.

and an absolute presence'⁷⁰³ and that, in a sign, 'the signified is originally and essentially... *always already in the position of the signifier*'.⁷⁰⁴

8.2.4 Trace and *différance*

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida conceives of the transcendental ground of meaning-making not in terms of a transcendental signified but rather in terms of an originary 'arche-writing' or 'movement of difference',⁷⁰⁵ where, at the same time, the 'arche-trace' or 'originary trace' is a 'concept... [that] destroys its name'.⁷⁰⁶ In other words, the arche-trace, posited to describe that which transcends and, indeed, enables the very possibility of making meaning, effaces 'itself' in 'its' very mode of operation. The arche-trace 'exists', therefore, neither as a determinate meaning nor as a metaphysical entity (e.g., the 'real', 'empirical mark' of a 'first writing'). Indeed, as Derrida points out, the arche-trace, if it is to elude the antinomies associated with the transcendental signified is, by necessity, always already 'encountered' *as* absent, *as* disappeared, *as* effaced. Consequently (and, as noted in chapter 3, in a fashion that harmonises with the Lacanian conception of the 'unary trait' as presented in *Seminar IX*), Derrida insists that

The concept of arche-trace... is in fact contradictory and not acceptable within the logic of identity. The trace is not only the disappearance of origin... it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin.⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰³ Ibid, 69. Indeed, Derrida continues (in what is clearly a criticism of Lacan's account of 'full' and 'empty' speech in 'Function and Field'): 'That is why there is no full speech, however much one might wish to restore it by means or without benefit of psychoanalysis.'

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid, 73.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid, 60.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid, 61.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid.

Notwithstanding the status of the ‘originary trace’ as that ‘which must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased’⁷⁰⁸, it is characterised as the ‘*pure* movement which produces difference. *The (pure) trace is différance*’⁷⁰⁹ where, moreover, ‘Différance is... the formation of form. But it is *on the other hand* the being-imprinted of the imprint.’⁷¹⁰ In suggesting that the trace and *différance* involve a *forming* that is, at the same time, a *being formed* – or, alternatively, a simultaneity of or reciprocity between movements of inscription and effacement – Derrida emphasises their resistance to metaphysical characterisation in terms of originating forces or activities, or the loci of such.

Derrida goes on to characterise the movement of *différance* or ‘origin of signification’ in terms of a ‘*spacing* (pause, blank, punctuation, interval in general, etc.)’, which ‘is always the unperceived, the nonpresent, and the nonconscious.’⁷¹¹ In consequence, Derrida suggests: ‘Spacing as writing is the becoming-absent and the becoming-unconscious of the subject.’⁷¹² To be clear on this point, Derrida does *not* mean that the spacing/writing associated with *différance* witnesses subjective disappearance and loss of consciousness – as if *différance* operates on a pre-existing entity that is present and conscious. On the contrary, the sense of Derrida’s comment is that *différance* ‘reveals’ the ‘way of being’ of ‘the subject’ *as* absence and unconscious.

Here, it is important to note that, by ‘spacing’, Derrida has in mind ‘the articulation of space and time, the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space’.⁷¹³ This rather enigmatic formulation is clarified in ‘Difference’ (1968). Here, Derrida presents

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid, 62.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid, 63.

⁷¹¹ Ibid, 68.

⁷¹² Ibid, 69.

⁷¹³ Ibid, 68.

différance as a neologism that exploits inherent ambiguities in the French verb *différer*. In this way, *différance* refers to the simultaneity or reciprocity of two modes of differing: difference as ‘distinction’ or ‘inequality’ and difference as ‘delay’ or the ‘interval of a spacing and a temporalizing’.⁷¹⁴ Reiterating points made in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida affirms that the tracing involved in the movement of *différance* involves a reciprocity of effacement and re-inscription. Hence *Différance* is characterised as

...what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be ‘present’ ... is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element.⁷¹⁵

Likewise, addressing the trace, Derrida insists it

...not a presence, but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace... from the start, effacement constitutes it as a trace ... makes it disappear in its appearing, makes it issue forth from itself in its very position.⁷¹⁶

Derrida’s characterisation of *différance* in terms of the production of an ‘interval’, a ‘spacing’ or ‘temporalizing’ implies that the kind of writing inculcated by *différance* is not merely a simultaneous operation of inscription and effacement within an ostensibly pre-existing or transcendental space and time – rather, *différance* implies a writing that makes and re-makes space and time consequent to its ‘activity’. It is in this space-time produced and re-produced that difference *becomes* as a play of differences sustained indefinitely (hence the movement of meaning is inculcated in a manner that both erases its origin and indefinitely defers its ‘end’). The trace is, precisely, what is glimpsed in this

⁷¹⁴ Ibid, ‘Differance’, in *Speech and Phenomena, And Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, trans David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, originally published as ‘La Differance’ in *Bulletin de la Societe Francais de philosophie*, v67, n3, July – September 1968), 129.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid, 142.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid, 156.

production of a space-time interval that is, in Derrida's words, 'Constituting itself, dynamically dividing itself... spacing; time's becoming spatial or space's becoming-temporal (temporalizing).'⁷¹⁷ I would suggest that these two terms could be characterised, equivalently, as the simultaneous and reciprocal movement of 'becoming difference' and 'difference becoming' that is intrinsic to writing and the movement of meaning.

8.2.5 Ek-sistence and *ekstasis*

In Lacan's work, the term 'ex-sistence' apparently derives from Heidegger's concept of 'ek-sistence' – itself, a modification of the ancient Greek word *ekstasis* (literally 'out-standing' – the state of being transported from or outside oneself, this self-transcendence also being associated with the culmination of existential possibilities). This is implicit in the essay 'Letter on "Humanism"' (1946), where Heidegger asserts that

...standing in the clearing of being I call the ek-sistence of human beings... Ek-sistence so understood is not only the ground of the possibility of reason, *ratio*, but is also that in which the essence of the human being preserves the source that determines him.⁷¹⁸

In order to understand Heidegger's meaning, it is necessary to appreciate that he conceives of the human being (in Heidegger's terminology, *Dasein* – literally: 'there-being') in terms of that which is or makes a 'clearing' in the field of being. Thus, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger suggests that

To say that [*Dasein*]... is 'illuminated' means that it is cleared in itself *as* being-in-the-world, not by another being, but in such a way that it *is* itself the clearing... By its very nature, *Dasein* brings its there along with it... *Dasein is its disclosedness*.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁷ Ibid, 143.

⁷¹⁸ Heidegger, 'Letter on "Humanism"' (1946) in *Pathmarks* (originally written as a letter to Jean Beaufret, 1946 and originally published with 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth (Bern: A. Francke A.G., 1947)), 247.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid, *Being and Time*, trans Joan Stambaugh, revised and with a Foreword by Dennis J. Schmidt (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010, originally published as 'Sein und Zeit' in *Jahrbuch für Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Forschung*, v8, 1927), 129.

In Heidegger's thought, this idea is further elaborated by way of an appeal to the Greek notion of *aletheia* or unconcealment. Here, the critical idea is that *Dasein*, ek-sisting as a clearing in the field of being, is defined in terms of a necessary counterpoise of unconcealment and concealment. For example, in the essay , 'On the Essence of Truth' (1943), Heidegger states that

To let be... to let beings be as the beings that they are... means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness [i.e., the 'clearing'] into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself. Western thinking in its beginning conceived this open region as... the unconcealed...⁷²⁰

and

Precisely because letting-be always lets beings be in a particular comportment that relates to them and thus discloses them, it conceals beings as a whole. Letting-be is intrinsically at the same time a concealing.⁷²¹

An in-depth consideration of these matters is beyond the scope of the present study. Nevertheless, it may be observed that the counterpoise of unconcealment and concealment proper to the 'clearing' of the Heideggerian *Dasein* resonates with the reciprocity of meaning repression and meaning overdetermination (or the return of the repressed meaning) proper to the Lacanian model of subjectivity.⁷²²

8.2.6 The real Thing

⁷²⁰ Ibid, 'On the Essence of Truth' in *Pathmarks* (originally presented 1930 and originally published 1943 (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann)), 144.

⁷²¹ Ibid, 148.

⁷²² For further, useful discussion of Heidegger's appropriation of *aletheia*, the reader is directed to Mark A. Wrathall, 'Unconcealment' in Hubert L. Dreyfus & Mark A. Wrathall (eds), *A Companion to Heidegger* (Malden & Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 337-57, and Julian Young, 'Being, truth and metaphysics' in *Heidegger's Later Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5-30.

On the basis of the discussion presented in chapter two, it may be evident that *das Ding*, considered as a ‘real’ ‘structuring of structure’ resonates with Derrida’s conception of the trace and *différance*. Relevant, here, are Derrida’s aforementioned assertions that ‘*The (pure) trace is différance*’ and, moreover, ‘*Differance is... the formation of form*. But it is *on the other hand* the being-imprinted of the imprint.’ More specifically, however, Lacan’s use of the term *das Ding* recalls the consideration of the being or ‘thingliness’ of a peasant’s jug or vase in Heidegger’s essay ‘The Thing’ (1951). Whilst a thoroughgoing elucidation of this matter lies beyond the concerns of this project, it may be noted that parallels obtain between the Lacanian conception of *das Ding* as a ‘real’ ‘structuring of structure’ and Heidegger’s use of the word in order to address the question of Being – where, in this context, ‘Being’ precisely connotes ‘reality’ or ‘the real’: the logico-structurally mandated ‘ground’ or condition of possibility of there being a counterpoise between unconcealment and concealment. In the poetic language employed in ‘The Thing’, this is evident from Heidegger’s reference to the ‘thinging’ of ‘the thing’ as a ‘gathering’ of the ‘fourfold’ of heaven and earth, gods and mortals:

The thing things. Thinging gathers. Appropriating the fourfold, it gathers the fourfold’s stay, its while, into something that stays for a while: into this thing, that thing.⁷²³

It must be conceded that elaborating this consonance is not a straightforward exercise: Lacanian and Heideggerian conceptions of the real are not synonymous. Moreover, in *Seminar VII*, whilst there is explicit acknowledgement of ‘the function of *das Ding* in Heidegger’s approach to the contemporary revelation of what he calls Being and that is linked to the end of metaphysics’, Lacan specifically denies that this is the impetus of his own discussion. Rather, Lacan appropriates Heidegger’s account of the peasant’s vase in order to illustrate the relationships between the signifier in its ‘signifying essence’, nothingness, and the real. Hence, Lacan asserts that the vase is ‘in its signifying essence a

⁷²³ Heidegger, ‘The Thing’ in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans with an introduction by Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2001 (1971)), originally presented as ‘Das Ding’ at the Bayerischen Akademie der Schönen Künste, 6 June 1950 and originally published in *Jahrbuch der Bayerischen Akademie der Schönen Künste*, Band 1, *Gestalt und Gedanke*, 1951, 128ff), 171-72.

signifier of nothing other than of signifying as such', 'an object made to represent the existence of the emptiness at the centre of the real that is called the Thing' and, therefore, a confirmation that 'the fashioning of the signifier and the introduction of a gap or hole in the real is identical'.⁷²⁴

8.2.7 *Dasein*: being possible

As suggested in chapter two, the understanding of the Lacanian unconscious as a field of pure potentials resonates with Heidegger's definition of *Dasein* in terms of potentials and possibilities, and his conception of the temporality of *Dasein* in terms of *ekstasis*. For example, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger asserts that *Dasein* is 'The being which is concerned in its being about its being' and, therefore, 'is related to its being as its ownmost possibility. *Dasein* is always its possibility.'⁷²⁵ Still further, Heidegger also suggests that

Dasein is not something objectively present which then has as an addition the ability to do something, rather it is primarily being-possible... The essential possibility of *Dasein*... [is] always already... the potentiality of being itself, for its own sake.⁷²⁶

⁷²⁴ Lacan, *Seminar VII*, 120, 121.

For a nuanced and lucid interpretation of Heidegger's multivalent conception of 'Being', I refer the reader to Young, 'Being, truth and metaphysics', 5-30. For useful discussion of what Heidegger means by the 'Thing' and the 'Fourfold', see James C. Edwards, 'The Thinging of the Thing: The Ethic of Conditionality in Heidegger's Later Work' in Dreyfus & Wrathall, 456-67, and Young, 'The Fourfold' in Guignon (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, 2nd ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006 (1993)), 373-92. For further, sophisticated discussion of what Lacan's use of the term *das Ding* in *Seminar VII* implies for the question of resonances between Lacanian and Heideggerian thought, the reader is referred to Gabriel Riera, 'Abyssal Grounds: Lacan and Heidegger On Truth' in *Qui Parle*, v9, n2, Special Issue on Lacan, Spring/Summer 1996, 51-76 (see, especially, 67-74).

⁷²⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 42.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

With regard to the notion of *ekstasis*, it is necessary to take cognizance of Heidegger's definition of the 'primordial ontological ground of the existentiality of Dasein' as '*temporality [Zeitlichkeit]*',⁷²⁷ where 'Temporality "is" not a *being [Seiendes]* at all... but rather *temporalizes*... possible ways of itself', thereby making 'possible the multiplicity of the modes of being of Dasein'. Heidegger defines these modes of being in temporal terms as 'Future, having-been, and present' or 'the *ecstasies* of temporality'. On this basis, Heidegger suggests that 'Temporality is not, prior to this, a being that first emerges from itself; rather, its essence is temporalising in the unity of the *ecstasies*' – i.e., in the field of subjective potential and possibility.⁷²⁸

For further clarification of these ideas, the reader is referred to the lucid discussion in Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time* (2005, 1996). Here, Mulhall suggests that 'Heidegger's idea is not that human beings necessarily exist *in* time but rather that they exist *as* temporality... human existence most fundamentally *is* temporality' where

...temporality is not an entity, not a sequence of self-contained moments that move from future to present to past, and not a property or feature of something, but is, rather, akin to a self-generating and self-transcending process.

Mulhall goes on to explain that, since this process 'underpins the Being of Dasein', it also enlivens the possibility of this Being as ecstatic – i.e., 'the distinctively human capacity to be at once ahead, behind and alongside oneself, to stand outside oneself, to exist'. In consequence, Mulhall suggests that 'if Dasein's unity as an existing being is literally "ecstatic" (a matter of Dasein's Being-outside-itself, hence being internally related to what it is not, being non-self-identical)', then this ecstatic quality extends to considerations of temporality. As Mulhall puts it, 'past, present and future are not coordinates or dimensions but "ecstasies" – modes of temporality's self-constituting self-transcendence'. This, Mulhall concludes, is what Heidegger means by the enigmatic

⁷²⁷ Ibid, 224.

⁷²⁸ Ibid, 314.

characterisation of temporality in its essence as ‘temporalising in the unity of the *ecstasies*’.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁹ Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*, 2nd ed (London and New York: Routledge, 2005, 1996), 161-62.

8.3 'Influence' and 'agency'

It is evident that, in seeking to understand the forces implicated in the creation of artworks and the development of artistic *oeuvres*, art scholars frequently make recourse to the idea of artistic 'influences'. Critics of this idea point out that precisely 'in what' influence consists, and 'how' it is transmitted through space and time, is profoundly enigmatic. From the perspective of this project, whilst these interventions have considerable merit, they are open to criticism insofar as they repudiate the idea of 'influence' in favour of a reification of the creativity and agency of individual art subjects or 'ones that are conscious'. I would concede that, in the first instance, the attribution of expressions of subjectivity to a 'force' or 'intentionality' that is unconscious (more precisely, a dialectical *tension* between consciousness and the unconscious) would seem no less 'enigmatic' than the positing of 'influence'. However, it is the position of this study that, from a Lacanian perspective, the very idea that 'one' is 'under the influence' precisely misrecognises expressions of subjectivity *as* expressions of 'ones that are conscious'. This misrecognition is predicated on the metaphysical preconception or rationalisation that, entirely and sufficiently, it is the nature of subjectivity to be grounded in the 'conscious one' – a self-contained, delimited, autonomous agent. Hence, anything that disrupts this false sense of self-unity and self-determination seems inherently 'other', 'enigmatic', 'mysterious'.

In general terms, the 'enigma' of 'influence' is emphasised in Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), where it is listed among those structuring 'unities of discourse' that must be discarded in order to develop less prejudicial forms of historical enquiry. In Foucault's view, influence is troubling insofar as it

...provides a support – of too magical a kind to be very amenable to analysis – for the facts of transmission and communication; which refers to an apparently causal process (but with neither rigorous delimitation nor theoretical definition), the phenomena of resemblance or repetition; which links, at a distance and through

time – as though the mediation of a medium of propagation – such defined unities as individuals, *oeuvres*, notions, or theories.⁷³⁰

Of more immediate relevance to the practice of art history is the ‘*Excursus against influence*’ presented in Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention, On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (1985). In Baxandall’s view:

‘Influence’ is a curse of art criticism primarily because of its wrong-headed grammatical prejudice about who is the agent and who the patient: it seems to reverse the active/passive relation which the historical actor experiences and the inferential beholder will wish to take into account. If one says that X influenced Y it does seem that one is saying that X did something to Y rather than that Y did something to X. But in the consideration of good pictures and painters the second is always the more lively reality.⁷³¹

8.3.1 McCahon discourse: Leech and Pound

In McCahon discourse, the appeal to influence would seem to be exemplified by the claim made in Brown and Keith, *An introduction to New Zealand painting* (1969), that, during his visit to the United States in 1958, McCahon’s ‘exposure... to current American painting profoundly influenced his own.’⁷³² However, in direct response to this assertion, Green, in ‘McCahon’s Visit to the United States, A reading of letters and lecture notes’ (1975), suggests that, whilst McCahon’s American experience was a ‘stimulus’ that ‘set him up’ for an ‘outflow’ of work subsequently, there was ‘No flash of insight, no exposure to the art of the centre, therefore no “profound” influence from American Art.’⁷³³

⁷³⁰ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972, originally published as *L’Archéologie due savoir* (Éditions Gallimard, 1969), 21.

⁷³¹ Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention, On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 58-59.

⁷³² Brown and Keith, *An introduction to New Zealand painting* (London and Auckland: Collins, 1969), 189.

⁷³³ Green, in ‘McCahon’s Visit to the United States, A reading of letters and lecture notes’, *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History*, v3, 1975, 19.

This claim is also addressed in Leech's essay: ' "A Sort of Generalized Thing": McCahon, Influence and Explanation' (2004) – one of the most exhaustive considerations of the issue of 'influence' in McCahon discourse and one that is, moreover, fully cognizant of the interventions of writers like Baxandall. As Leech points out, the title of his essay reflects McCahon's assessment of his American visit as an experience from which

It was almost impossible to sort out any influences. It was a jumble of various things, and certainly it was not always the obvious, the big names that carried the most lasting interest for me. Rather than specific people it was finally a sort of generalized thing that left its mark.⁷³⁴

From the perspective of a study appealing to psychoanalytic theory in order to expose and ameliorate the myths and prejudices of traditionalising art history, Leech's essay is of interest insofar as it attributes to the scholarly discipline of art history a 'syndrome' that is not merely an expression of institutional structures but also of desires. The symptoms of this malaise are evident in the recourse art history makes to 'hard causal schedules' (a phrase, that as Leech acknowledges, derives from Baxandall's essay 'The language of art criticism' (1991) in order to justify indulging in various forms of 'explanatory determinism' and 'influence fabrication'. Leech proposes that this 'syndrome' is a product of an uneasy conflation of two tendencies present in the arts discourse of the late nineteenth century. Firstly, the emergence of art history as a scholarly discipline 'anxious' to legitimise its practices and secure its authority by accruing to itself certain features of scientific orthodoxy (e.g., the positing of 'hard causal schedules'). Secondly, the mode of 'art appreciation' in which, rather less rigorously, the understanding of art proceeds on the basis of contingent associations (i.e., as Leech points out, the overly simplistic positing of positive resemblances). In the colourful language Leech employs, the contemporary issue of this 'incompatible partner[ship]' of art academia and art

⁷³⁴ McCahon quoted in Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist* (1984), 92, and reproduced in Leech, ' "A Sort of Generalized Thing": McCahon, Influence and Explanation,' *Journal of New Zealand Art History*, v25, 2004, 80.

appreciation is the ‘deformed child called “art history” in which an archaeology of association comes to function as “cause” ’.⁷³⁵

In consequence, whilst Leech acknowledges and agrees with Green’s repudiation of the claim made in Brown and Keith, he also observes: ‘what quickly becomes clear is that Green is not in any sense *resisting* the language and explanatory determinism of influence; rather he wants to argue that Keith had picked on the *wrong* influences.’⁷³⁶ Leech then reproduces Green’s comment that ‘Any account of influences in the States must include Mondrian, Tessai, possibly Gris and Gauguin.’⁷³⁷ Whilst it is true that Green does not interrogate the conceptual prejudices inherent in the notion of ‘influence’, he does, tacitly, relegate influence as subsidiary to McCahon’s activity as an art-maker and art-explorer. Hence, Green’s comment: ‘What hits me is not influences but after McCahon’s return from the states the outflow’ and ‘His experience in the States was far more than picture-gazing. That is why “influences” is only a small part of the question.’⁷³⁸ Indeed, on reflection, it is striking that, however much Leech finds fault with Green, in the final analysis, both Leech and Green are, in effect, playing down the role of ‘influence’ in order to reify the creative power of the particular art subject called ‘McCahon’. In other words, in the writing of Leech and Green, what underlies the dismissing or de-emphasising of ‘influence’ is the symptom *par excellence* of arts scholarship – namely, the privileging of the notion of artistic genius, originality, and authenticity.

⁷³⁵ Leech, ‘“A Sort of Generalized Thing”’, 80-81. The reference to ‘hard causal schedules’ may be found in Baxandall, ‘The language of art criticism’ in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, eds, *The language of art history* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1991, originally published as ‘The Language of Art History’ in *New Literary History*, 10, 1979, 453-65), 73.

⁷³⁶ Leech, ‘“A Sort of Generalized Thing”’, 82.

⁷³⁷ Green, ‘McCahon’s Visit to the United States’, 19, cited in Leech, ‘“A Sort of Generalized Thing”’, 82.

⁷³⁸ Green, ‘McCahon’s Visit to the United States’, 19.

In the case of Leech, specifically, this prioritisation echoes that made in another important essay on the topic of McCahon and 'influence', namely, Pound's 'McCahon, Mondrian, Masking Tape'. Here, one finds the suggestion that McCahon's 'response to Mondrian... in the face of a major "overseas" master, may be a means of at once accepting that master, and of asserting one's *difference* – or of asserting *New Zealand's* difference.'⁷³⁹ In support of this view, Pound cites Ian Burn, 'The Re-Appropriation of Influence' (1988), in which the response of Australian, modernist artists (specifically, Sidney Nolan) to the modernist canon is characterised as an 'evasive strategy, of participation and demurring at the same time'.⁷⁴⁰ Pound also appeals to Harold Bloom's psychological model of artistic creation, whereby later artists creatively 'misread' their canonical predecessors in accordance with what Bloom terms the 'anxiety of influence'. Among the works Pound cites, in this context is, Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (1994), wherein Bloom asserts:

The anxiety of influence is not an anxiety about the father, real or literary, but an anxiety achieved by and in the poem, novel, or play. Any strong literary work creatively misreads and therefore misinterprets a precursor text or texts... the strongly achieved work is the anxiety.⁷⁴¹

In consequence, Bloom maintains that

Tradition is not only a handing-down or process of benign transmission; it is also a conflict between past genius and present aspiration, in which the prize is literary survival or canonical inclusion... Poems, stories, novels, plays come into being as a response to prior poems, stories, novels, and plays, and that response depends upon

⁷³⁹ Pound, 'McCahon, Mondrian, Masking Tape', 14.

⁷⁴⁰ Ian Burn, 'The Re-Appropriation of Influence' in The Biennale of Sydney, *The 1988 Australian Biennale, From the Southern Cross: A View of World Art, c.1940-88* (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation Enterprises and The Biennale of Sydney Limited, 1988), 47, cited in Pound, *ibid.*

⁷⁴¹ Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 8. The 'anxiety of influence' is the fundamental theme in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence, A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

acts of reading and interpretation by the later writers, acts that are identical with the new works.⁷⁴²

In harmony with Bloom's ideas, Pound suggests that McCahon's interpretation of modernism (specifically, Mondrian) is 'weirdly novel' in accordance with McCahon's status as ' "a-modern", a painter outside the centres of modernity, and thus neither modern nor not.'⁷⁴³ In consequence, for Pound, McCahon's work is

...an art of the periphery, modernist but not quite, at once inside and outside the whole modernist endeavour. It is this eccentricity – his provinciality, in this substantive, non-pejorative, sense – which makes for his strength and his novelty.⁷⁴⁴

According with the impetus of Pound's argument, Leech, similarly, privileges that which he considers to be singular and novel in McCahon's painting. This is evident from his assertion that 'certainly what McCahon wanted pictorially to derive from the certitudes of Gris and Mondrian is indeed eccentric.'⁷⁴⁵ Leech then proceeds to detail how certain of McCahon's *Gate* and *Elias* series paintings deliberately violate the paradigmatic, spatial flatness of modernism in favour of a 'three-dimensional, sculptural property' that follows from the 'distinctively... "a-modern eyes" ' with which McCahon views the world.⁷⁴⁶

8.3.2 Hotere discourse: O'Brien and Baker

In Hotere discourse, there has been no rigorous questioning of the notion of influence *per se*. Rather (as Leech observes with regard to Green), debate fixates on *what* influences are of greatest import – a field that includes western style high modernism, the

⁷⁴² Ibid, *The Western Canon*, 8-9.

⁷⁴³ Pound, 'McCahon, Mondrian, Masking Tape', 16-17.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid, 17.

⁷⁴⁵ Leech, ' "A Sort of Generalized Thing" ', 86.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid, 86-87.

Catholic tradition, and Hotere's affiliation with Te Aupōuri (if not, Māoritanga in a more general sense). Moreover, whilst one seldom finds appeals to influence as simplistic or reductive as those condemned by the likes of Baxandall or Leech (at least, in the scholarship produced since the latter 1990s), the question of Hotere's 'influences' tends to operate in a vague and ambiguous counterpoint with invocations of Hotere's artistic agency. The point may be illustrated with reference to the writing of two prominent Hotere scholars, O'Brien and Baker. For example, in O'Brien's *Hotere, Out The Black Window*, one finds mention of '...the American abstractionist Ad Reinhardt, whose work was to become Hotere's major influence during the following decade.'⁷⁴⁷ In relation to Hotere's literary influences, O'Brien suggests 'Bill Manhire's poetry has been an abiding influence over Hotere's language-based work' and 'Another overriding influence... was Ralph Hotere's father Tangirau, who instilled a sense of the incantatory capabilities of language in his son from an early age...'.⁷⁴⁸ At the same time, however, O'Brien characterises Hotere's engagement with Māori culture as a matter of 'Necessary distances'.⁷⁴⁹ Thus, whilst acknowledging that 'Hotere has never belittled or downplayed his cultural origins (and he would posit the early influence of a devout Catholic upbringing in that category)', O'Brien asserts, nevertheless, that Hotere finds 'being labelled "Maori artist"... constrictive.' Consequently, the relevant 'range of influence' must extend beyond Toi Māori and encompass, for example, 'references... to pivotal Modernist artists including... Malevich... Reinhardt, McCahon...'.⁷⁵⁰ In a similar fashion, O'Brien's essay, 'Tenebrae – Transfigured Night', one finds the opening statement:

While the art of Ralph Hotere has been shaped by elements of both Māori and Western spirituality, his work moves beyond those traditions to occupy a territory at once broad and non-sectarian, yet at the same time subtly formed and nuanced by his background. When considering Hotere's recurrent engagement with the spiritual

⁷⁴⁷ O'Brien, *Hotere, Out The Black Window*, 19.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid, 73.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid, 75.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid, 76.

or inner life, the hybridised Māori-Catholic tradition of his upbringing is ground zero.⁷⁵¹

The tendency, in O'Brien's writing, to oscillate between appeals to Hotere's 'influences' and appeals to Hotere's 'agency' is mirrored in Baker's doctoral dissertation *A World of Black and Light, Ralph Hotere 1968-1977* (2009). Here, for example, one encounters ostensibly reductive observations: 'From the mid-1960s and through the early 1970s Reinhardt was, arguably, the major influence for Hotere',⁷⁵² and more moderate assessments: 'Hotere does not necessarily always agree with or follow Reinhardt's proscriptions on art'; 'the way in which Hotere diverges from Reinhardt's dictates is equally as revealing as where he confirms in his own work Reinhardt's theories on what art should and should not be.'⁷⁵³ As these two citations indicate, it is apparent that, in common with O'Brien (not to mention Green, Pound and Leech), Baker relinquishes appeals to 'influence' only to reify and privilege the notion of the creative power and agency of the artist-individual.

With regard to Hotere's debt to mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge and understanding), Baker states, without ambiguity, that 'an inherent understanding and expression of Maori tikanga (customs) forms an underlying element within much of Hotere's work',⁷⁵⁴ and that, moreover, 'Hotere's cultural background is as much part of his art as the influence of an international modernist aesthetic'.⁷⁵⁵ In consequence, Baker devotes the final chapter of her thesis to a consideration of 'A Whakapapa Of Black and Light' – with a particularly in-depth consideration of the rich meaning resonances enlivened by the Māori text in *Godwit/Kuaka* (1977).⁷⁵⁶ Whilst Baker's contextual

⁷⁵¹ Ibid, 'Tenebrae – Transfigured Night', 27.

⁷⁵² Baker, *A World of Black and Light*, 38.

⁷⁵³ Ibid, 93.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid, 2.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid, 3, n8.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid, 211, 239-76.

analysis of *Godwit/Kuaka*'s text is a valuable contribution to Hotere discourse, in the context of the present study, where there is resistance to the traditionalising mode of art history, one might express disquiet over Baker's attempt to locate Hotere's work within a 'lineage of black',⁷⁵⁷ and her claim to 'have found... that *Godwit/Kuaka* represents a critical moment in Hotere's career.'⁷⁵⁸ Moreover, the ambiguous, if not enigmatic, nature of 'influence' reasserts itself in Baker's conclusion when, in relation to works like *Godwit/Kuaka*, she presents the following statement:

It is my suggestion that the task Hotere set himself, whether consciously or subconsciously, was to allow the Maori aspects of his work and heritage to be expressed on an equal footing with twentieth-century abstraction so that the one did not detract from the other, but that they rather fed into and reinforced one another.⁷⁵⁹

In the context of this study, Baker's appeal to the idea of tasks one sets oneself *subconsciously* clearly privileges the notion that, in general, expressions of subjectivity are grounded in or equivalent to the expressions of individual subjects. The subconscious, it should be noted, is a term designating that part of *one's* psyche that (1) 'underlies' or 'grounds' consciousness (i.e., the seat of instincts or intuitions). However, in this regard, Baker contradicts her thesis Introduction, where she contends that Hotere has

...whether consciously or unconsciously... remained close to the prescriptions of Contemporary Maori Art as described by Skinner in that ultimately his work seeks a form of 'integration rather than rupture'.⁷⁶⁰

Here, Baker appeals to the argument presented in Skinner's book *The Carver and the Artist: Māori Art in the Twentieth Century* (2008), where it is suggested:

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid, 9-10, 45.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid, ii.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid, 286.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid, 5.

Contemporary Māori Art is formally a practice of integration rather than rupture, in which the pictorial space works to bridge divisions and the art work's main task is the construction of a strong Māori identity.⁷⁶¹

Regardless of whether one finds Skinner's argument convincing, Baker's suggestion that Hotere may have *unconsciously* sought to maintain a certain integrity of the self seems a contradiction in terms. Is it not the case that, always already, unconscious imperatives testify to a 'self' whose nature is precisely to be split, fractured: *in itself other than itself* – which is to say, that which exceeds and eludes the metaphysical distinctions between self and other, or that which is inside and outside *one*? This conceptual confusion is compounded by Baker's later appeal to the notion of the subconscious. Here, in effect, Baker elides the instrumental distinction between 'unconscious' (i.e., that part of psychical 'reality' that is *transindividual* and *otherness*) and 'subconscious' (i.e., that part of the psyche that is individual – a substrate of the *one*) – privileging the latter at the expense of the former.⁷⁶²

⁷⁶¹ Skinner, *The Carver and the Artist: Māori Art in the Twentieth Century* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008), 134, cited in Baker, *A World of Black and Light*, 4, 5. That extending Skinner's thesis to Hotere's work may be problematic is evident from the observation, in chapter one, that there is a reification of difference in those of Hotere's paintings employing both Māori and English language script (e.g., *Darkness Settles Down*, *Me Tangi Ko Te Mate I Te Marama*). Indeed, I would suggest that this incompatibility reflects the manner by which Hotere's work exceeds and eludes labels like 'Contemporary Māori Art', 'New Zealand Modernism', and so forth.

⁷⁶² I would point out that, in perpetrating these conceptual confusions, Baker seems not to have taken cognizance of an earlier criticism of, precisely, this issue in Wedde, 'Figure it Out', 183.

8.4 Unconscious *structure* versus unconscious *process*

Among the ambiguities defining Lacanian theory is the dual attribution of the term ‘unconscious’ as an adjective (i.e., unconscious psychological processes) *and* a noun (i.e., *the* unconscious as a system or structure). It may be apparent that this ambiguity resonates with that discussed, in the thesis Prologue, in relation to the real. Namely, the ambiguity arising from the real, understood as a *material substrate of* representation/symbolisation and as an *impossibility* arising in the form of a necessary counterpoise *with* representation/symbolisation. In the former case, the real is conceived in *metaphysical-dynamical* terms; in the latter case the real is conceived in *logico-structural* terms. This tension between the metaphysical and the structural also obtains in the dual application of ‘unconscious’ to, respectively, *processes* occurring within the psyches of individual subjects and the ‘transindividual’ field or *system* that eludes and exceeds metaphysical determination. Here, I should point out that the resolution of these antinomies is not the primary aim of this study. My responsibility is, rather, to acknowledge the existence of these contradictions insofar as they define the limits of a project devoted to the elucidation of a non-metaphysical model of subjectivity, wherein non-metaphysical interpretations are accorded priority.

8.4.1 The Freudian view

With this point of mind, it may be noted that, in his essay ‘The Unconscious’, Freud distinguishes between unconscious psychological *acts* and *processes*, and *the unconscious* as a psychological *system* (*Ucs.*) in a triadic topography that also comprises the conscious (*Cs.*) and the preconscious (*Pcs.*).⁷⁶³ Immediately, then, what is called ‘unconscious’ takes on a dual aspect. In the former case, ‘unconscious’ is deployed adjectively to characterise a psychological process that takes place apart from or away from the cognizance of consciousness. Here, it should be noted that, in Freud’s writing, consciousness is divested of its active principle and privilege, and characterised as that which passively perceives

⁷⁶³ Freud, ‘The Unconscious’ (1915) in SE, v14, 172-73.

‘mental processes... [that] are in themselves unconscious’.⁷⁶⁴ Indeed, one of the fundamental justifications for the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious is the fact that, as Freud points out:

...the data of consciousness have a very large number of gaps... which can be explained only by presupposing other acts, of which, nevertheless, consciousness affords no evidence. These not only include parapraxes and dreams in healthy people, and everything described as a psychical symptom or an obsession in the sick; our most personal daily experience acquaints us with ideas that come into our head we do not know from where, and with intellectual conclusions arrived at we do not know how.⁷⁶⁵

In the latter case, ‘unconscious’ is deployed as a noun to characterise a structure or system such that

The nucleus of the *Ucs.* consists of instinctual representatives which seek to discharge their cathexis; that is to say, it consists of wishful impulses. These instinctual impulses are co-ordinate with one another, exist side by side without being influenced by one another, and are exempt from mutual contradiction.⁷⁶⁶

In consequence, a certain ambiguity arises from the inference that the term ‘unconscious’ applies both to (1) a ‘transindividual’ *structure* or field and (2) *processes* by virtue of which the structure is expressed in individual subjects. The force of this antinomy becomes evident when one considers Freud’s assertion that

The processes of the system *Ucs.* are *timeless*; i.e., they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all. Reference to time is bound up... with the work of the system *Cs.*⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid, 171.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid, 166-67.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid, 186.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid, 187. The conception of the unconscious as a field, the processes ‘in’ which are eternal and indestructible (i.e., changeless), also is evident in *ibid*, ‘The Interpretation of Dreams (second part)’ (1900) in SE, v5, 577, where Freud asserts that ‘it is a prominent feature of unconscious processes that they are indestructible. In the unconscious nothing can be brought to an end, nothing is past or forgotten.’

8.4.2 The Lacanian view

Lacan's writing echoes this Freudian understanding of the unconscious in terms of *structure* and *process* (albeit, *atemporal*). For example, in the 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"', the notion of the indestructibility of unconscious formations informs the discussion of repetition automatism. Here, Lacan asserts that

...in repetition automatism... the subject follows the channels of the symbolic... It is not only the subject, but the subjects, caught up in their intersubjectivity, who line up... who, more docile than sheep, model their very being on the moment of the signifying chain that runs through them.

If what Freud discovered... has a meaning, it is that the signifier's displacement determines subjects' acts, destiny, refusals, blindnesses, success, and fate, regardless of their innate gifts and instruction, and irregardless of their character or sex; and that everything pertaining to the psychological pre-given follows willy-nilly the signifier's train, like weapons and baggage.⁷⁶⁸

This is, perhaps, one of Lacan's clearest statements that subjects are, basically, automatons completely at the mercy of a supervening symbolic order. However, the symbolic structure, to which Lacan alludes, would appear to be shot through with process insofar as it is distinguished by 'channels' through which the signifier and signifying chain 'runs' in a 'displacement' that leaves a 'train'. This seeming antinomy becomes particularly acute where Lacan affirms (in the afterword to his essay) that

...the remembering [*mémoration*] at stake in the unconscious – and I mean the Freudian unconscious – is not related to the register that is assumed to be that of memory, insofar as memory is taken to be a property of a living being.

...we can find in the ordered chains of a formal language the entire appearance of remembering, and quite especially of the kind required by Freud's discovery.

In consequence, Lacan concludes that

⁷⁶⁸ Lacan, 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"', 21.

...the links [i.e., structure of relations of difference or differential traces between signifiers] of this [symbolic] order are the only ones that can be *suspected to suffice* to account for Freud's notion of the indestructibility of what his unconscious preserves.⁷⁶⁹

Moreover, Lacan also suggests that, in the 'autonomy of the symbolic' and the 'exigencies of the symbolic chain' (i.e., the manner by which the symbolic order is defined in terms of structural/grammatical/syntactical permissions and prohibitions), the 'indestructible persistence of unconscious desire is situated'.⁷⁷⁰

Indeed, Lacan's sensitivity to the contradiction arising from the dual conception of the unconscious as structure and unconscious process is evident in *Seminar I*, where this issue is confronted by way of an appeal to the Hegelian notion that '*The concept is the time of the thing.*'⁷⁷¹ That is to say, *things* (or, equivalently, aspects of the *real*) do not exist *in time* but rather *are temporal* or *are as becoming*. Relevant, here, is Hegel's assertion, in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), that

Time is the Notion itself that *is there* and which presents itself to consciousness as empty intuition; for this reason, Spirit [i.e., mind or mentation] necessarily appears in Time, and it appears in Time just so long as it has not *grasped* its pure Notion, i.e., has not annulled Time. It is the *outer*, intuited pure Self which is not grasped by the Self, the merely intuited Notion; when this latter grasps itself it sets aside its Time-form, comprehends this intuiting, and is a comprehended and comprehending intuiting. Time, therefore, appears as the destiny and necessity of the Spirit that is not yet complete within itself...⁷⁷²

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid, 31.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid, 39.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid, *Seminar I*, 242-43. For a reference to Hegel's assertion that 'the concept is the time of the thing' see, for example, Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 27, where Hegel asserts: 'As for time... it is the existent Notion itself.' For a further elaboration of Hegel's ideas, see, also, the discussion in Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 130-150.

⁷⁷² Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 487. It should be noted that what is at question in Hegel's assertion is whether the 'Self' ever can completely grasp its 'pure Notion' (i.e., its way of being *as temporality*, becoming). Insofar as the *Phenomenology* outlines a path to 'Absolute Knowing', Hegel posits this subjective apotheosis as a realisable ideal (for some references supporting this interpretation, see, *ibid*, 'Preface', 3-4, 15-17, 'Introduction', 56-57', and 'Absolute Knowing',

It should be apparent that the Lacanian understanding of concepts (i.e., signifieds) as meaning ideals is a necessary consequence of the impossibility of ever being able to absolutely determine the (Hegelian) thing which exists *as* temporality, *as* becoming. For this reason, Lacan describes the ‘relation of the concept to the thing’ as an ‘identity in difference’ – terminology, I would suggest, that alludes to the manner by which, moment by moment, the thing-in-becoming is becoming different from itself and thus is that which, necessarily and inevitably, eludes and exceeds absolute determination in a concept. Support for this reading may be found in Lacan’s suggestion that the ‘identity in difference... already saturated in the thing’ implies ‘absolute mobility in the existence of things such that the flow of the world never comes to pass twice by in the same situation.’⁷⁷³ In view of these determinations, Lacan asserts:

At this point we find ourselves at the heart of the problem that Freud sets up when he says that the unconscious is located outside time. It is true, and it isn’t. It is located outside time exactly like the concept, because it is in itself time, the pure time of the thing, and as such it can reproduce the thing within a certain modulation, whose material support can be anything. The compulsion to repeat involves nothing but this.⁷⁷⁴

In other words, it is not so much that the unconscious is atemporal *per se* but rather that the unconscious *is temporality* or *temporally structured* insofar as it expresses the ‘pure time of the thing’ – i.e., the ‘real time’ or ‘real temporality’ within which the thing eternally *is as* becoming and thus *is as* potential and *as* possibility. Indeed, insofar as the unconscious also admits consideration as the field of signifiers as potential meaning-forms, one might go so far as to say that the unconscious is *the potential to form meaning of the real* – although, as noted in the Prologue, this formulation is, itself, complicated by

492-93). However, as noted in Casey and Woody, 87, this is precisely where ‘Hegelian phenomenology and Lacanian psychoanalysis part company... Lacan would foreswear such a claim to absolute knowledge... because of his conviction that there is no final insight or definitive truth to be had.’

⁷⁷³ Lacan, *Seminar I*, 243.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid.

the ambiguous status of the Lacanian real as that which eludes and exceeds determination in metaphysical terms.

8.5 Freud's conception of primary and secondary processes

8.5.1 The human psyche as a homeostasis

Simply stated, Freud conceives of the psyche (or psychical reality) in terms of a homeostasis maintained by virtue of the reciprocity between two processes – the so-called *primary process* and the so-called *secondary process*. The primary process reflects the functioning of the libido (the fundamental animating principle of the organism) as it is expressed in the form of unconscious wishes. By definition, the 'contents' of the unconscious are repressed and thus unavailable to consciousness. The secondary process mediates (filters, censors) libidinal desires in such a way that, in the part of the unconscious Freud terms *preconscious*, they become ideas or objects of thought potentially available to consciousness. The primary process functions purely in accordance with what, in 'The Interpretation of Dreams', Freud initially refers to as the 'unpleasure principle' (later, simply the 'pleasure principle').⁷⁷⁵ The secondary process operates, additionally, in accordance with what Freud will later name the 'reality principle'.⁷⁷⁶

For the sake of simplicity, most of the following discussion draws on material presented in 'The Interpretation of Dreams'. Nevertheless, it should be noted that an earlier understanding of the human psyche as a homeostasis is presented in the 'Project for a Scientific Psychology'. Here, for example, Freud invokes a 'principle of neuronal inertia' in order to elaborate the relationship obtaining between a 'primary function of the nervous system', which seeks to fully discharge psychical energy or cathexis, Q , and a 'secondary function' that preserves 'a store of $Q\dot{\eta}$ sufficient to meet the demand for a

⁷⁷⁵ Freud, 'The Interpretation of Dreams (second part)' (1900) in SE, v5, 600-04.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid, 565-601, see especially 567 (n2, added 1914). For a reference to Freud's earliest employment of the terms 'pleasure principle' and 'reality principle' see *ibid*, 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning' (1911) in SE, v12, 218-226.

specific action', subject to what Freud terms '*the exigencies of life*.'⁷⁷⁷ Furthermore, in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', the conception of the human psyche as a homeostasis is reiterated in terms of a 'principle of constancy'.⁷⁷⁸ Here, however, it should be understood that Freud's analysis of the psychical phenomenon of repetition compulsion leads him to posit something that exceeds and eludes this psychical homeostasis – namely, the so-called 'beyond' of the pleasure principle, which Freud also refers to as the 'death instinct'.⁷⁷⁹ The relationship between the 'beyond' of the pleasure principle, the 'death instinct', the 'compulsion to repeat', and the nature of subjective desire is discussed in chapter four.

8.5.2 Basic functioning of the psychical apparatus

In the chapter of 'The Interpretation of Dreams' entitled 'Wish-Fulfilment' (SE, v5, VII. C), Freud presents a gloss of the primary process by imagining how the human 'psychical apparatus' may have functioned at an earlier stage in its evolution. He proposes, first, a basic conservation principle according to which the apparatus seeks to keep itself 'free from stimuli'. Hence, in its primitive incarnation, the psychical apparatus would have functioned like a 'reflex apparatus, so that any sensory excitation impinging on it could be promptly discharged along a motor path.' To illustrate this tendency, Freud refers to the helpless crying and kicking of a hungry infant. When the infant's need is satisfied (i.e., it is fed), Freud conceives of an 'experience of satisfaction... which puts an end to the internal stimulus.' Intrinsic to this experience of satisfaction is a 'particular perception' (by which I take Freud to mean a sensory experience – i.e., 'of nourishment') that, itself, gives rise to a 'mnemic image... which remains associated thenceforward with the memory trace of the excitation produced by the need.'⁷⁸⁰ Having theorised this

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid, 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (1895) in SE, v1, 296-97. Some of this material is discussed in chapter three.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920) in SE, v18, 9.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid, 18-23, 36-39.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid, 'The Interpretation of Dreams (second part)' (1900) in SE, v5, 565.

connection between a perception and a thought image or memory trace, Freud suggests that the next time the need arises:

...a psychical impulse will at once emerge which will seek to re-cathect the mnemic image of the perception and to re-evoke the perception itself, that is to say, to re-establish the situation of the original satisfaction. An impulse of this kind is what we call a wish; the reappearance of the perception is the fulfilment of the wish; and the shortest path to the fulfilment of the wish is a path leading direct from the excitation produced by the need to a complete cathexis of the perception.⁷⁸¹

For example, when one is hungry, one tends to recall the *memory* of eating as a first step towards satisfying the need. However, it is obvious that if the mere memory of eating sufficed to satiate hunger then starvation would soon result. For this reason, Freud conceives of the necessity for a ‘second system, which is in control of voluntary movement’ and which inhibits ‘regression’ (i.e., the mere, hallucinatory perpetuation of a mnemic image of satisfaction) in order to ‘arrive at a more efficient expenditure of psychical force... which lead[s] eventually to the desired perceptual identity being established from the direction of the external world.’⁷⁸² That is to say, an experience of satisfaction that is based in reality, as opposed to fantasy or hallucination.

8.5.3 Mediation of the primary process by the secondary process

With this preliminary understanding of the two systems operating in the psychical apparatus, one may proceed to Freud’s chapter on ‘The Primary and Secondary Processes – Repression’ (SE, v5, VII, E). Here, Freud asserts:

I propose to describe the psychical process of which the first system admits as the ‘primary process’, and the process which results from the inhibition imposed by the second system as the ‘secondary process’.⁷⁸³

⁷⁸¹ Ibid, 565-66.

⁷⁸² Ibid, 566. See also *ibid* (n1), where it is reaffirmed that the term ‘perceptual identity’ means ‘something perceptually identical with the “experience of satisfaction”.’

⁷⁸³ Ibid, 601.

In working towards this formula, Freud revisits the notion 'of a primitive psychical apparatus whose activities are regulated by an effort to avoid an accumulation of excitation and to maintain itself as far as possible without excitation.'⁷⁸⁴ As Freud relates, further:

...the accumulation of excitation... is felt as unpleasure and... it sets the apparatus in action with a view to repeating the experience of satisfaction, which involved a diminution of excitation and was felt as pleasure. A current of this kind in the apparatus, starting from unpleasure and aiming at pleasure, we have termed a 'wish'; and we have asserted that only a wish is able to set the apparatus in motion and that the course of the excitation in it is automatically regulated by feelings of pleasure and unpleasure.⁷⁸⁵

Freud then reiterates that the most primitive kind of wishing involves a regression that, by itself, cannot relieve the accumulation of excitation arising from need:

The first wishing seems to have been a hallucinatory cathecting of the memory of satisfaction. Such hallucinations, however, if they were not to be maintained to the point of exhaustion, proved to be inadequate to bring about the cessation of the need or, accordingly, the pleasure attaching to satisfaction.⁷⁸⁶

In order to inhibit the condition of regression, Freud recalls that it 'became necessary' to posit 'the activity of a second system' that

...diverted the excitation arising from the need along a roundabout path which ultimately, by means of a voluntary movement, altered the external world in such a way that it became possible to arrive at a real perception of the object of satisfaction.⁷⁸⁷

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid, 598.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid, 598-99.

Whilst Freud concedes that he has no knowledge of the actual ‘mechanics’ of the processes at work in the primary and secondary systems, nevertheless, he reaffirms that

...the activity of the first... system is directed towards securing the *free discharge* of the quantities of excitation, while the *second* system, by means of the cathexes emanating from it, succeeds in *inhibiting* this discharge and in transforming the cathexis into a quiescent one, no doubt with a simultaneous raising of its potential.⁷⁸⁸

And, furthermore:

When once the second system has concluded its exploratory thought-activity, it releases the inhibition and damming-up of the excitations and allows them to discharge themselves in movement.⁷⁸⁹

8.5.4 Relationship of primary and secondary processes to the psychical systems *Ucs.* and *Pcs.*

In his discussion of the primary and secondary processes, Freud states explicitly that the two systems in question are ‘the germ of what, in the fully developed [psychical] apparatus, we have described as the *Ucs.* and *Pcs.*’⁷⁹⁰ That is to say, the primary process reflects the functioning of the system *Ucs.* and the secondary process reflects the functioning of the system *Pcs.* The ‘psychical apparatus’ to which Freud alludes is elaborated in the chapter on ‘Regression’ (SE, v5, VII, B). Here, Freud, describes it as a virtual ‘compound instrument’ comprised of a series of ‘agencies’ [*Instanzen*] or ‘systems’ through which, in a ‘given psychical process, the excitation passes... in a particular *temporal* sequence.’⁷⁹¹ Initially, Freud conceives of the apparatus as that in which psychical processes advance from ‘the perceptual end to the motor end’ (from the

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid, 599.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid, 599-600.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid, 599.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid, 536-37.

Pcpt. system to the *M.* system) via a series of intermediate ‘memory traces’ or ‘mnemic systems’ (*Mnem.* systems).⁷⁹² Freud suggests that the *Pcpt.* system, which provides consciousness with immediate sense experience is, itself, lacking in memory. By contrast, the *Mnem.* systems ‘are in themselves unconscious. They can be made conscious; but there can be no doubt that they can produce all their effects while in the unconscious condition.’⁷⁹³ Freud, then, seeks to reconcile his conception of a psychical apparatus with what was, earlier, hypothesised as necessary for dream formation – namely, ‘two psychical agencies, one of which submitted the activity of the other to a criticism which involved its exclusion from consciousness’ where the ‘critical agency... stands in a closer relation to consciousness than the agency criticised: it stands like a screen between the latter and consciousness.’⁷⁹⁴ On this basis, Freud elaborates his psychical apparatus as a series of agencies proceeding thus: *Pcpt...* *Mnem...* *Mnem...* {*Ucs*}... *Pcs* – where the preconscious system (*Pcs*) mediates the admission of the contents of the unconscious system (*Ucs*) to consciousness.⁷⁹⁵

8.5.5 Repression as a function of the primary and secondary processes

In Freud’s view, the manner by which the preconscious, secondary process mediates, inhibits, or censors that which is produced by virtue of the activity of the unconscious, primary process (i.e., memories of satisfaction, unconscious wishes) is synonymous with psychical repression. Freud’s speculates that, in accordance with the unpleasure principle, the basis of repression can be glimpsed in the manner by which a primitive psychical

⁷⁹² Ibid, 537-39.

⁷⁹³ Ibid, 539.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid, 540. Here, Freud is recalling the discussion in the chapter on ‘Distortion in Dreams’ in *ibid*, SE, v4, 144, where it is suggested that there are ‘two psychical forces’ expressed in dreams: ‘one of these forces constructs the wish which is expressed by the dream, while the other exercises a censorship upon this dream-wish and, by the use of that censorship, forcibly brings about a distortion in the expression of the wish.’ Furthermore, Freud asserts that nothing enters consciousness ‘without passing the second agency’ which, at the same time, makes ‘such modifications as it thinks fit in the thought which is seeking admission to consciousness.’

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid, ‘The Interpretation of Dreams (second part)’ (1900) in SE, v5, 541.

apparatus reflexively withdraws from the perception of pain. Indeed, Freud suggests that, in an apparatus of this kind,

...no inclination will remain to recathect the perception of the source of pain, either hallucinatorily or in any other way. On the contrary, there will be an inclination in the primitive apparatus to drop the distressing memory-picture immediately, if anything happens to revive it, for the very reason that if its excitation were to overflow into perception it would provoke unpleasure (or, more precisely, would begin to provoke it).

On this basis, Freud proposes:

This effortless and regular avoidance by the psychical processes of the memory of anything that had once been distressing affords us the prototype and first example of *psychical repression*.

and, furthermore:

As a result of the unpleasure principle, then, the first... system is totally incapable of bringing anything disagreeable into the context of its thoughts. It is unable to do anything but wish.⁷⁹⁶

By contrast, what Freud refers to as the ‘exploratory thought-activity’ of the second system implies that, in order to inhibit regression and divert psychical energies towards efficacious modifications of the external world, ‘it requires free access to *all* the memories laid down by experience.’⁷⁹⁷ However, in accordance with the unpleasure principle, the secondary system nevertheless ‘find[s] a method of cathecting unpleasurable memories which would enable it to avoid releasing the unpleasure.’ Thus, ‘cathexis by the second system implies a simultaneous inhibition of the discharge of excitation’ and, consequently, the ‘key to the whole theory of repression’ is that ‘*the second system can only cathect an idea if it is in a position to inhibit any development of*

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid, 600.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid.

*unpleasure that may proceed from it.*⁷⁹⁸ In other words, even as the second system seeks the investing/release of libidinal energy, it does so in such a way as to inhibit the development of unpleasure. This does not imply that there is never any experience of unpleasure. Freud allows that the inhibition of unpleasure need not be complete: ‘a beginning of it must be allowed, since that is what informs the second system of the nature of the memory concerned and of its possible unsuitability for the purpose which the thought-process has in view.’⁷⁹⁹ However, Freud’s commentary implies that the activity of filtering or censoring of the secondary system is such that, in general, it will not cathect distressing memories unless this investment of emotional energy is *ultimately* efficacious for the divesting of unpleasure. In consequence, Freud maintains that memories of distressing experiences that are unsuitable for the purposes of the secondary system remain repressed.

8.5.6 Freud’s first psychical topography of *Ucs.*, *Pcs.*, and *Cs.*

Following his account of the primary and secondary processes, Freud proceeds to elaborate with greater care the distinction between the unconscious and consciousness in the chapter entitled ‘The Unconscious and Consciousness – Reality’ (SE, v5, VII, F). To begin with, Freud takes pains to emphasise the limitations of conceiving of psychical systems ‘topographically’ as ‘psychical localities’. Strictly speaking, the primary and secondary ‘systems’ are better described in terms of ‘the existence of two kinds of *processes of excitation or modes of its discharge.*’⁸⁰⁰ Hence, unconscious, preconscious and conscious systems are not actual ‘psychical entities’ occupying specific locations in the psyche (or, even, in the brain) but rather designate the modes of resistance and facilitation that occur among nervous pathways. Given that the ‘objects’ of internal reflections are ‘virtual’, Freud suggests that the psychical systems operate in a manner analogous to the lenses in a telescope. The manner by which the secondary process

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid, 601.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid, 601.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid, 610.

modifies or represses the content of the first is thus akin to the refraction of light passing through different media (i.e., from air to glass).⁸⁰¹

Secondly, Freud asserts that it is necessary to relax the prejudice according to which mind is defined solely in terms of (or seen to originate solely from) consciousness and accept the thesis that the greater part of the psyche is subject to unconscious processes. Hence, Freud states:

It is essential to abandon the overvaluation of the property of being conscious before it becomes possible to form any correct view of the origin of what is mental... The unconscious is the true psychical reality...⁸⁰²

In other words, as discussed in section 1.4, expressions of subjectivity/meaning-making would seem to be less a matter of what *one gives* consciously than that which, by virtue of the unconscious, is *given to one*. This said, Freud does not deny that consciousness ‘contributed its share’ to these creative activities, but he considers it the ‘much-abused privilege of conscious activity, wherever it plays a part, to conceal every other activity from our eyes.’⁸⁰³

Freud then reiterates and summarises his theory of the unconscious in relation to the *Ucs.* and *Pcs.* systems discussed previously. In Freud’s view, dream analysis demonstrates that the unconscious

...is found as a function of two separate systems... Thus there are two kinds of unconscious... one of them, which we term the *Ucs.*, is also *inadmissible to consciousness*, while we term the other the *Pcs.* because its excitations – after observing certain rules, it is true, and perhaps only after passing a fresh censorship, though nonetheless without regard to the *Ucs.* – are able to reach consciousness.⁸⁰⁴

⁸⁰¹ Ibid, 611.

⁸⁰² Ibid, 612-13.

⁸⁰³ Ibid, 613-14.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid, 614-15.

Hence, the *Pcs.* operates like a ‘screen’ between the *Ucs.* system and consciousness as well as controlling ‘access to voluntary movement’.⁸⁰⁵

In light of these ruminations, Freud is led to propose that the once ‘omnipotent’ faculty of consciousness, behind which the true psychical nature of the mind was occluded, is now reduced to the status of a ‘*sense-organ for the perception of psychical qualities.*’ Freud goes so far as to say (reiterating his observations in the chapter on ‘Regression’) that the system of conscious perception (*Cs.*) resembles the previously discussed perceptual systems *Pcpt.* ‘as being susceptible to excitations by qualities but incapable of retaining traces of alterations – that is to say, as having no memory.’⁸⁰⁶ Thus, Freud concludes:

The psychical apparatus, which is turned towards the external world with its sense-organ of the *Pcpt.* systems, is itself the external world in relation to the sense-organ of the *Cs.*, whose teleological justification resides in this circumstance.⁸⁰⁷

Where the *Cs.* system receives

Excitatory material... from two directions: from the *Pcpt.* system, whose excitation, determined by qualities, is probably submitted to a fresh revision before it becomes a conscious sensation, and from the interior of the apparatus itself, whose quantitative processes are felt qualitatively in the pleasure-unpleasure series when, subject to certain modifications, they make their way to consciousness.⁸⁰⁸

In Freud’s thought, then, consciousness retains aspects of agency (or at least ‘systematicity’) – but it is one psychical agent among several and, moreover, dependent, in its functioning, on the unconscious and preconscious psychical systems. In this way,

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid, 615.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid, 615-16.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid, 616.

the Freudian conception of consciousness removes it from its once central position in the theory of mind and relegates it as one, almost subsidiary, system among several. Indeed, the conscious system is reduced to a psychical 'sense-organ' that lacks memory.

8.6 Saussure's conception of the linguistic sign and linguistic value

8.6.1 Saussure's definition of the linguistic sign

In Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), the linguistic sign is defined as a 'two-sided psychological entity' in which a 'concept' (signified) and a 'sound image' (signifier) are 'intimately united' in a bi-univocal reciprocity where 'each recalls the other.'⁸⁰⁹ Here, it should be understood that, when Saussure refers to the term 'sound-image' (or, in other contexts, simply, 'sound'), he does *not* mean an actual, material sound but rather the *mental representation* of phenomenal experience. This is clear from his assertion that the

...sound-image... is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it "material," it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it to the... concept, which is generally more abstract.⁸¹⁰

8.6.2 The concrete indeterminacy of the linguistic sign

Saussure's positive conception of the psychical reality of the linguistic sign is evident from assertions such as: 'Language is concrete... Linguistic signs, though basically psychological, are not abstractions' rather they 'are realities that have their seat in the brain... linguistic signs are tangible' and 'The signs that make up language are not abstractions but real objects... signs and their relations are what linguistics studies; they are the *concrete entities* of our science.'⁸¹¹ On this basis, Saussure states two conditions necessary for the existence and definition of the linguistic sign: (1) 'The linguistic entity

⁸⁰⁹ Saussure, 66.

⁸¹⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹¹ Ibid, 15, 102.

exists only through the associating of the signifier with the signified' (i.e., the positing of an *identity*) and (2) 'The linguistic entity is not accurately defined until it is *delimited*, i.e., separated from everything that surrounds it on the phonic chain. These delimited entities or units stand in opposition to each other in the mechanism of language' (i.e., the positing of a contextual *relation of difference* among identities).⁸¹²

However, these principles are subject to several complicating factors. In the first place, the characterisation of the sign in terms of an 'intimate unity' of signified and signifier does *not* imply that these associations are, necessarily, predetermined or inevitable. In Saussure's view: 'The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary' – which is to say that no 'inner relationship' or 'natural connection' obtains between them.⁸¹³ Secondly, Saussure admits that the 'delimitation' of signs presents a challenge and, indeed, can only be established or inferred in retrospect: 'language does not offer itself as a set of pre-delimited signs that need only be studied according to their meaning and arrangement; it is a confused mass, and only attentiveness and familiarization will reveal its particular elements.'⁸¹⁴ In consequence, Saussure claims that 'Language... has the strange, striking characteristic of not having entities that are perceptible at the outset and yet of not permitting us to doubt that they exist and that their functioning constitutes it.'⁸¹⁵ Thirdly, Saussure insists that the signified and the signifier have no real existence (even as psychological 'realities... in the brain') apart from their dual relation in the linguistic sign. Consequently, 'Whenever only one element is retained, the entity [i.e., the sign] vanishes; instead of a concrete object we are faced with a mere abstraction.'⁸¹⁶

⁸¹² Ibid, 102-03.

⁸¹³ Ibid, 67, 69.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid, 104.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid, 107.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid, 102-03.

The strictly theoretical existence of the signified and the signifier follows from Saussure's hypothesis that signs are produced by virtue of the structuring of an undifferentiated field of 'thought-sound' by language: 'Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language.'⁸¹⁷ Here, it is important to appreciate that Saussure attributes no independent existence to 'thoughts' (i.e., abstract concepts) and 'sounds' (i.e., phenomenal representations). Saussure does claim that the 'role of language is... to serve as a link between thought and sound'. Moreover, he proposes that language, considered in its entirety, can be regarded as 'a series of contiguous subdivisions marked off on both the indefinite plane of jumbled ideas... and the equally vague plane of sounds'.⁸¹⁸ Nevertheless, his commentary also makes clear that this construction is a retrospective effect of language – a conception that would not be possible without language. That is to say, language does *not* enable the linkage between two *pre-existing, independent* realms: thought and phenomenal representation. On the contrary, it is by virtue of language that the undifferentiated field 'thought-sound' (not to mention the theoretical division or structuring of this field into planes of 'thought' and 'sound') becomes conceivable *as such*. It is in this light that one may understand Saussure's elaboration:

Thought, chaotic by nature, has to become ordered in the process of its decomposition. Neither are thoughts given material form nor are sounds transformed into mental entities; the somewhat mysterious fact is rather that "thought-sound" implies division, and that language works out its units while taking shape between two shapeless masses.⁸¹⁹

On this basis, Saussure concludes:

Language can... be compared with a sheet of paper: thought is the front and the sound the back; one cannot cut the front without cutting the back at the same time; likewise in language, one can neither divide sound from thought nor thought from

⁸¹⁷ Ibid, 112.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid.

sound; the division could be accomplished only abstractedly, and the result would be either pure psychology or pure phonology.⁸²⁰

8.6.3 The ideal identity and relative difference of the linguistic sign

To the extent that the linguistic sign is a positive psychical reality or necessity, expressing an identity between the signified and the signifier, the possibility is enlivened that, in principle, signs might embody or encapsulate meaning in an intrinsic or determinate fashion. However, as previously discussed, Saussure concedes that the precise determination of signs proves, ultimately, to pose insurmountable difficulties. Hence, the ability of signs to function as autonomous ‘nuggets’ or ‘building blocks’ of meaning would appear to be less *real* than *ideal*. Indeed, Saussure suggests that signs are only conceivable *as such* by virtue of language operating on the hypothetically undifferentiated field of ‘thought-sound’. In a manner reminiscent of Lacan’s conception of the real, the Saussurean realm of ‘thought-sound’ would appear to be, quite literally, unthinkable ‘outside’ language. Hence, always already, the question of its nature and existence is posited within the horizon of language. In other words, in Saussure’s linguistics, ontological priority must be accorded to language *per se* rather than its ‘elements’. The question thus arises as to the nature of language if it is not conceivable, simply or immediately, as a set of positive entities called ‘signs’. In the *Cours*, this question is addressed by considering language to be ‘a system of pure values... determined by nothing except the momentary arrangement of its terms’ which are ‘rigidly interdependent.’⁸²¹ In other words, Saussure’s conception of ‘linguistic value’ implies that meaning is *not* an intrinsic quality of signs – on the contrary, meaning obtains within a wider context or field by virtue of relations of difference between signs (i.e., meaning is *diacritical*). With reference to the disposition of pieces in a game of chess, Saussure also suggests that, in language, at each particular moment in time, there obtains a ‘state of equilibrium’ or ‘synchrony’ within which ‘each linguistic term derives its value from its opposition to all the other terms’ and where these ‘values depend above all else on an

⁸²⁰ Ibid, 113.

⁸²¹ Ibid, 80-81.

unchangeable convention' or 'set of rules'.⁸²² On this basis, the linguistic sign admits consideration as a *synchronic identity* – i.e., a particular association of a signified and a signifier obtaining at a particular time.

Equivalently, one might say that the field of values or differential relations between signs, precisely, is that which enlivens the very possibility of determining a sign as a particular synchronic identity. In other words, linguistic value is not equivalent to a meaning or even the *process* of meaning-making but rather is associated with the *conditions of possibility* on which basis meaning-making/signification depends. That Saussure does, indeed, consider linguistic value in these terms is evident from his statement:

...in semiological systems like language, where elements hold each other in equilibrium in accordance with fixed rules, the notion of identity blends with that of value and *vice versa*... that is why the notion of value *envelopes* [my emphasis] the notions of unit, concrete entity, and reality.⁸²³

In effect, this is to assert that meaning is not solely an expression of an intrinsic property of signs (i.e., an *identity* of signified and signifier) but also an expression of *relations of difference*. Consequently, Saussure insists that

...the idea of value... shows that to consider a term as simply the union of a certain sound with a certain concept is grossly misleading. To define it in this way would isolate the term from its system; it would mean assuming that one can start from the terms and construct the system by adding them together when, on the contrary, it is from the interdependent whole that one must start and through analysis obtain its elements.⁸²⁴

⁸²² Ibid, 88.

⁸²³ Ibid, 110.

⁸²⁴ Ibid, 113.

The crux of this discussion is to reiterate that there are neither ideas nor phenomenal representations pre-existing the system of language – instead, one finds only ‘*values* emanating from the system.’ When values

...correspond to concepts, it is understood that the concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not.⁸²⁵

Saussure goes on to assert that

The conceptual side of value is made up solely of relations and differences with respect to the other terms of language, and the same can be said of its material side. The important thing is not the sound alone but the phonic differences that make it possible to distinguish this word from all others, for differences carry signification.⁸²⁶

On this basis, Saussure makes his oft-cited observation:

...in language there are only differences *without positive terms*. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system. The idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it.⁸²⁷

where, to be clear, I would reiterate that ‘phonic substance’ should be understood to mean ‘phenomenal representation’.

This said, however, Saussure immediately adds the following qualification:

But the statement that everything in language is negative is true only if the signified and the signifier are considered separately; when we consider the sign in its totality,

⁸²⁵ Ibid, 117.

⁸²⁶ Ibid, 117-18.

⁸²⁷ Ibid, 120.

we have something that is positive in its own class. A linguistic system is a series of differences of sound combined with a series of differences of ideas; but the pairing of a certain number of acoustical signs with as many cuts made from the mass of thought engenders a system of values; and this system serves as the effective link between the phonic and the psychological elements within each sign. Although both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately, their combination is a positive fact...⁸²⁸

Here, Saussure seemingly reifies his positivist conception of the sign – in apparent contradiction of his own acknowledgement that (1) in principle, the sign resists determination (indeed, the ‘identity’ it entails is, strictly speaking, virtual or theoretical) and (2) the sign does not ‘engender’ but is, in fact, *derivative of* language considered as a diacritical system of pure values.

That Saussure is entirely cognizant of this conundrum is implicit in his aforementioned observation that ‘the somewhat mysterious fact is... that “thought-sound” implies division, and that language works out its units while taking shape between two shapeless masses.’ Moreover, a few pages prior to this admission, Saussure concedes that ‘Linguistics... works continuously with concepts forged by grammarians without knowing whether or not the concepts actually correspond to the constituents of the system of language.’ Only through accepting that ‘the concrete entities of language are not directly accessible’ can one ‘come into contact with the true facts’ (presumably, that signs are a product of language operating on the undifferentiated field of ‘thought-sound’). On this basis, it is possible to ‘set up all the classifications that linguistics needs for arranging all the facts at its disposal’ even if ‘to base the classifications on anything except the concrete entities... is to forget that there are no linguistic facts apart from the phonic substance cut into significant elements.’⁸²⁹ In other words, in order to make meaning, one posits, *by necessity* as it were, ‘concrete entities’ (i.e., signs) as constituent elements in the field of meaning – even though, on further analysis, it becomes evident that these entities not only resist precise determination but are, moreover, only

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

⁸²⁹ Ibid, 110.

conceivable in relation to language considered negatively as a system of pure values or differential relations. Thus, the sign, conceived as an identity of a signified and an signifier, is only *ostensibly* or *ideally* a determinate or determinable meaning. The ‘ideality’ of the sign inheres or insists in its resistance to precise determination. In the face of this resistance, one is led to a consider meaning-making in relation to linguistic value – those negative relations of difference, on which basis is enlivened the very possibility of positing meaning ideals.

8.7 Freud's conception of the 'compulsion to repeat' and the 'death instinct' in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'

8.7.1 The limits of the pleasure principle

Freud begins with a brief reiteration of the nature and reciprocal functioning of the 'pleasure principle' and 'reality principle' (as noted in section 8.5, these terms were originally introduced in the essay 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning', although Freud had, earlier, referred to an 'unpleasure principle' in 'The Interpretation of Dreams'). Thus, the pleasure principle is characterised as that which is expressed in the autonomous regulation of 'mental events... set in motion by an unpleasurable tension' such that the 'final outcome coincides with a lowering of that tension – that is, with an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure.'⁸³⁰ Freud also suggests that, whilst there is 'a strong *tendency* towards the pleasure principle' in the psyche, its absolute 'dominance' is 'opposed by certain other forces or circumstances, so that the final outcome cannot always be in harmony with the tendency towards pleasure.'⁸³¹ These other 'forces' are described, firstly, in terms of the mediating function of the reality principle (i.e., repression), and secondly, in terms of the return of repressed. Thus, in the former case, it is suggested that, whilst the reality principle *ultimately* conforms with the aim of the pleasure principle (i.e., the relieving of excitation, the production of pleasure), nevertheless, operating 'Under the influence of the ego's instincts of self-preservation', the reality principle

...demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure.

⁸³⁰ Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920) in SE, v18, 7.

⁸³¹ Ibid, 9-10.

In the latter event, Freud refers to the ‘release of unpleasure’ that, in the course of the ego’s ‘development’, arises from ‘conflicts and dissensions’ between ‘innate instinctual impulses.’⁸³² Whilst, initially, some impulses are repressed, ‘held back at lower levels of psychical development and cut off... from the possibility of satisfaction’, subsequently they may succeed ‘in struggling through, by roundabout paths, to a direct or... substitutive satisfaction’. In this case, Freud suggests that the relieving of excitation ‘which would in other cases have been an opportunity for pleasure, is felt by the ego as unpleasure.’ Indeed, whilst conceding that the ‘process’ of repression is not ‘clearly understood’, Freud maintains that ‘all neurotic unpleasure is... pleasure that cannot be felt as such.’⁸³³ To this extent, the return of the repressed can be understood in terms of pleasure for one psychic system (e.g., the *Ucs.* or unconscious part of the ego) at the cost of unpleasure for another (e.g., the *Pcs.* or preconscious part of the ego).⁸³⁴

⁸³² Ibid, 10. The manner by which the reality principle mediates the pleasure principle in accordance with the ego’s ‘instincts of self-preservation’ merits further explanation. Here, the implication is that, left to itself, the pleasure principle may imperil the life of the organism. Indeed, Freud asserts, further, that, whilst ‘the pleasure principle is proper to a *primary* method of working on the part of the mental apparatus... from the point of view of the self-preservation of the organism... it is from the very outset inefficient and even highly dangerous’ (ibid). As noted in chapter three (n318), the same idea is implicit in ibid, ‘Project for a Scientific Psychology’ (1895) in SE, v1, 296-97. Here, Freud refers to the necessity of a ‘secondary function’ of the psyche that preserves a ‘store’ of psychical energy sufficient to meet the ‘*exigencies of life*.’ Also relevant (and discussed in greater detail in section 8.5) is ibid, ‘The Interpretation of Dreams (second part)’ (1900) in SE, v5, 566, 598. Here, the mediating function of the secondary process is posited as a necessary counter to regression (i.e., the indulgence, by means of the primary process, in mnemonic images of satisfaction). It is clear that the life of the organism could not be sustained if hunger could be alleviated merely by recalling a memory of satiation, or if the pain from a life-threatening injury could be relieved simply by recalling a previous experience of pain relief. Moreover, insofar as the primary process is, by nature, *reflexive*, there is no guarantee that the instinctive withdrawal from painful stimulus is, in itself, sufficient to preserve life – as is, perhaps, encapsulated in the adage ‘from the frying pan into the fire’.

⁸³³ Ibid, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, (1920) in SE, v18, 11.

⁸³⁴ Here, it should be noted that ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ prefigures Freud’s so-called second psychical topography of id, ego and superego (discussed, more explicitly in ibid, ‘The Ego and the Id’ (1923) in SE, v19). On this basis, the ego is not identical to the system *Cs.* but rather is considered to possess conscious *and* unconscious strata. In ibid, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, (1920) in SE, v18, 19, this is evident from the distinction Freud makes between ‘the coherent ego and the *repressed*’ such that ‘It is certain that much of the ego is itself unconscious, and notably what we may describe as its nucleus; only a small part of it is covered by the term “preconscious”’.

That the psyche may evince something that not only eludes the mediation of the pleasure principle by the reality principle but that, also, exceeds the dominance of the pleasure principle *per se* is implicit in Freud's brief discussion of 'traumatic neurosis' as expressed in dreams. Affirming that the 'study of dreams may be considered the most trustworthy method of investigating deep mental processes', Freud observes that 'dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bring the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright.' To the extent that it gives rise to an *immediate* experience of fright, the re-living of trauma in dreams evidently short-circuits or bypasses the reality principle – a psychical function that, on Freud's account, reflectively temporises, enduring unpleasure in the short term in order to achieve a more efficacious accommodation with what, in the 'Project', Freud refers to as the 'exigencies of life'. However, it is also the case that the re-experiencing of trauma in *dreams* exceeds the pleasure principle insofar as it contradicts one of Freud's basic conjectures – namely, that dreams function as a way of *fulfilling* wishful impulses arising *by virtue of* the pleasure principle. In seeking to resolve this antinomy, Freud proposes:

If we are not to be shaken in our belief in the wish-fulfilling tenor of dreams by the dreams of traumatic neurotics, we still have one resource open to us: we may argue that the function of dreaming, like so much else, is upset in this condition and diverted from its purposes...⁸³⁵

8.7.2 The compulsion to repeat and the death instinct

Having thus specified the operational limits of the pleasure principle, and having raised the issue of traumatic experiences revisited in dreams as something potentially

⁸³⁵ Ibid, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', (1920) in SE, v18, 13. The status of dreams as wish-fulfilments also is discussed in *ibid*, 'The Interpretation of Dreams' in SE, v5, VII, C, 568, where Freud states that 'the reason... dreams are invariably wish-fulfilments is that they are products of the system *Ucs.*, whose activity knows no other aim than the fulfilment of wishes and which has at its command no other forces than wishful impulses.' See also *ibid*, 'On Dreams' (1901) in SE, v5, 678, where it is asserted that 'the content of a dream is the representation of a fulfilled wish... its obscurity is due to alterations in repressed material made by the censorship' (i.e., by virtue of the mediation of the secondary process or reality principle).

incompatible with the pleasure principle, Freud progresses to a more direct consideration of the compulsion to repeat. In this regard, Freud maintains that, for the most part, the compulsion to repeat, as a ‘manifestation of the power of the repressed’, ‘does not contradict the pleasure principle’ to the extent that the return of the repressed implies ‘unpleasure for one system and simultaneously satisfaction for the other.’ That is to say, the return of the repressed can be understood in terms of pleasure for one psychic system (e.g., the *Ucs.* or unconscious part of the ego) at the cost of unpleasure for another (e.g., the *Pcs.* or preconscious part of the ego). However, Freud invites the reader to consider a ‘new and remarkable fact’ – specifically, that

...the compulsion to repeat also recalls from the past experiences which include no possibility of pleasure, and which can never, even long ago, have brought satisfaction even to instinctual impulses which have since been repressed.⁸³⁶

By way of substantiating this claim, Freud refers to patients who, in the relationship established with the analyst during the course of treatment, repeat all manner of ‘unwanted situations and painful emotions’ experienced in the course of their passage from childhood to maturity. Freud also remarks on the tendency of some people to repeatedly make poor life choices, which they often ascribe to a ‘malignant fate’ – although, from a psychoanalytic perspective, ‘their fate is for the most part arranged by themselves and determined by early infantile influences.’⁸³⁷

In light of these considerations, Freud concludes that ‘there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle.’⁸³⁸ In seeking to account for this phenomenon, Freud proposes that it reflects a certain principle of conservation at work in instincts *per se* such that

⁸³⁶ Ibid, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, (1920) in SE, v18, 20.

⁸³⁷ Ibid, 21.

⁸³⁸ Ibid, 22.

...an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces... it is a kind of organic elasticity, or... the expression of an inertia inherent in organic life.

As Freud points out, the implication is that instincts are not merely drivers of ‘change and development’ but, on the contrary, express ‘the *conservative* nature of living substance.’⁸³⁹ On this basis, Freud conjectures that

If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for *internal* reasons – becomes inorganic once again – then we shall be compelled to say that ‘*the aim of all life is death*’ ...⁸⁴⁰

Indeed, Freud suggests that, if this death instinct is tenable then the ‘instincts of self-preservation’ do not legislate absolutely. Rather, they are strictly subsidiary to the basic impetus of the organism to ‘follow its own path to death, and to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself’. In short, as Freud concludes, ‘the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion.’⁸⁴¹

⁸³⁹ Ibid, 36.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid, 38.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid, 39.

8.8 Repression and exclusion: the primordial origin of subjectivity

8.8.1 The Freudian distinction between *Verdrängung* and, respectively, *Urverdrängung*, *Verwerfung*, and *Bejahung/Ausstossung*

Particularly relevant to the question of the primordial ground, advent, or founding moment of subjectivity are the distinctions Freud sustains between ‘*repression proper*’ or *Verdrängung* (i.e., the psychical function of repression/overdetermination of meaning) and that which admits consideration, variously, as ground or condition of possibility of these operations and/or that which is radically excluded from or beyond the terms of reference of these operations. To fully appreciate the nuances of Freud’s texts, I would suggest bearing in mind that *Verdrängung*, insofar as it is the psychical operation *par excellence* of meaning-making, also is intrinsic to the function of what Freud calls ‘intellectual judgement’. From this perspective, the distinctions Freud makes are those obtaining between judgement and that which is (1) condition of possibility *for* judgement, (2) radically other than or excluded from the frame of reference *of* judgement, or, paradoxically, (3) *both* conditions at the same time. This ambiguity reflects the fact that Freud’s terminology shifts over the course of his writing – an equivocation compounded in Lacan’s revisiting of Freud.

How is this so? Let us begin by detailing the distinctions in question. In the first place, in ‘Repression’, Freud proposes that repression *per se* ‘cannot arise until a sharp cleavage has occurred between conscious and unconscious mental activity’.⁸⁴² On this basis, Freud identifies the necessity of there being an *Urverdrängung* – a ‘*primal repression*’ or ‘first phase of repression’ by which an ideational representative of an instinct is ‘denied entrance into the conscious’. In the process, there is established a ‘fixation’ that is unconscious and that functions as a source of ‘attraction’ for further repressions. On Freud’s account, the establishment, via primal repression, of a fixation is pre-requisite for the functioning of *Verdrängung* – a ‘second stage of repression’ or ‘*repression*

⁸⁴² Ibid, ‘Repression’ (1915) in SE, v14, 147.

proper'.⁸⁴³ Moreover, whilst Freud's article does not state this explicitly, many commentaries (including some by Lacan) identify primal repression *with* the originary 'cleavage... between conscious and unconscious mental activity'. That is to say, primal repression is considered to be the founding operation of subjectivity (which is also to say that primal repression is implicated in the 'formation' of the unconscious, the signifying chain, and the symbolic order).⁸⁴⁴

⁸⁴³ Thus, in *ibid*, 148, it is asserted that, consequent to the 'cleavage... between conscious and unconscious mental activity',

We have reason to assume that there is a *primal repression*, a first phase of repression, which consists in the psychical (ideational) representative of the instinct being denied entrance into the conscious. With this a *fixation* is established; the representative in question persists unaltered from then onwards and the instinct remains attached to it.

On the basis of primal repression,

The second stage of repression, *repression proper*, affects mental derivatives of the repressed representative, or such trains of thought as, originating elsewhere, have come into associative connection with it. On account of this association, these ideas experience the same fate as what was primally repressed. Repression proper, therefore, is actually an after-pressure.

Moreover, Freud emphasises that the functioning of repression is to be conceived in terms of a counterpoise between the 'attraction' exerted by a primally repressed centre or nucleus of repression and the 'repulsion' of ideational representatives from consciousness that defines secondary repressions:

...it is a mistake to emphasize only the repulsion which operates from the direction of the conscious upon what is to be repressed; quite as important is the attraction exercised by what was primally repressed upon everything with which it can establish a connection. Probably the trend towards repression would fail in its purpose if these two forces did not co-operate, if there were not something previously repressed ready to receive what is repelled by the conscious.

⁸⁴⁴ For some references to the idea that 'primal repression', as conceived by Freud, is equivalent to the 'advent' of subjectivity or the 'formation' of the unconscious see, for example, Simon Boag, 'Freudian Repression, the Common View, and Pathological Science' in *Review of General Psychology*, v10, n1, 2006, 77, where it is observed that, on the Freudian model, 'primal repression... results in the formation of a nucleus of unconscious ideas'. See, also, Evans, 165, where primal repression is characterised as a '“mythical” forgetting of something that was never conscious to begin with, an originary “psychical act” by which the unconscious is first constituted'. Also relevant is Ragland-Sullivan, 113, where it is observed that 'Lacan upholds Freud's statement that repression (*Verdrängung*) requires the possibility of some prior repression as a foundation. Lacan makes *Urverdrängung* the equivalent of the fixing of a primary, signifying chain in the pre-specular and mirror-stage periods'.

Secondly, in ‘From the History of an Infantile Neurosis’ (1918 (1914)), Freud differentiates *Verdrängung* and *Verwerfung*. Here, *Verwerfung* is posed, tacitly, as a psychological function whereby an idea is rejected or excluded in a fashion that is more radical than repression considered as a function of judgement or meaning-making. Thus, in the context of a discussion addressing the so-called ‘Wolfman’s’ sexual neuroses and fear of castration, Freud invokes *Verwerfung* in order to distinguish a ‘repression’ from a more radical ‘condemning judgement’.⁸⁴⁵ Furthermore, addressing the Wolfman’s having ‘rejected castration’ (i.e., in the context of Freud’s discussion, submission to the authority of the Father), Freud remarks:

When I speak of his having rejected it, the first meaning of the phrase is that he would have nothing to do with it, in the sense of having repressed it. This really involved no judgement upon the question of its existence, but was the same as if it did not exist.⁸⁴⁶

For a reference to the idea that Lacan understands primal repression to be synonymous with the formation of the unconscious see, for example, Lacan, ‘The Signification of the Phallus’, 579. Here, Lacan observes that, among the ‘effects’ of the primordial signifier (here, referred to as the ‘phallus’) is the alienation of desire when ‘needs are subjected to demand’ (i.e., expressed in language – the discourse of the Other). Due to ‘their being put into signifying form as such and of the fact that it is from the Other’s locus that... [the] message is emitted’, needs ‘come back... in an alienated form.’ In consequence, Lacan concludes that

What is thus alienated in needs constitutes an *Urverdrängung* [primal repression], as it cannot, hypothetically, be articulated in demand; it nevertheless appears in an offshoot that presents itself in man as desire [*das Begehren*].

Similarly, in *ibid*, ‘The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious’, 691, Lacan suggests that ‘fantasy is really the “stuff” of the *I* that is primally repressed, because it can be indicated only in the fading of enunciation.’ That is to say, the ‘essence’ of subjectivity is the function of pure difference – the unary trait. On this basis, Lacan suggests that ‘our attention is now drawn to the subjective status of the signifying chain in the unconscious or, better, in primal repression (*Urverdrängung*).’ Here, then, Lacan makes a relatively unambiguous identification between the ‘signifying chain in the unconscious’ and that which is ‘primally repressed’.

⁸⁴⁵ Freud, ‘From the History of an Infantile Neurosis’ (1918 (1914))’ in SE, v17, 79-80.

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 84.

Thirdly, in 'Negation', Freud characterises the 'function' of 'intellectual... judgement' (of which, it may be reiterated, *Verdrängung* is the psychical underpinning) as 'a continuation, along the lines of expediency' of the primordial 'interplay of the primary instinctual impulses' or the 'original process by which the ego took things into itself or expelled them from itself according to the pleasure principle'. That is to say, *Bejahung* and *Ausstossung*, respectively.⁸⁴⁷ In light of these considerations, Freud attributes the 'polarity of judgement... to the opposition of the two groups of instincts we have supposed to exist' (i.e., what, in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', Freud refers to as 'life instincts' and 'death instincts') so that 'Affirmation – as a substitute for uniting – belongs to Eros; negation – the successor to expulsion – belongs to the instinct of destruction.' Crucially, however, Freud asserts that

...the performance of the function of judgement is not made possible until the creation of the symbol of negation has endowed thinking with a first measure of freedom from the consequences of repression and, with it, from the compulsion of the pleasure principle.

In other words, 'the creation of the symbol of negation' that makes possible 'the performance of the function of judgement' testifies to a 'beyond', or 'outside' of the 'original process by which the ego took things into itself or expelled them from itself according to the pleasure principle'.⁸⁴⁸

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid, 'Negation' (1925) in SE, v19, 239. In making this assertion, Freud's contends that 'judgement is concerned in the main with two sorts of decisions. It affirms or disaffirms the possession by a thing of a particular attribute; and it asserts or disputes that a presentation has an existence in reality.' (236). In Freud's view, the former kinds of judgements typically address whether a thing is 'good or bad, useful or harmful' and

Expressed in the language of the oldest – the oral – instinctual impulses, the judgement is: 'I should like to eat this', or 'I should like to spit it out'; and, put more generally: 'I should like to take this into myself and to keep that out.' That is to say: 'It shall be inside me' or 'it shall be outside me'. (237)

As Freud relates, further, this reflection on attributive judgements harmonises with the idea that 'the original pleasure-ego wants to introject into itself everything that is good and to eject from itself everything that is bad' where 'What is bad, what is alien to the ego and what is external are, to begin with, identical' (ibid).

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid, 239.

8.8.2 Lacan's transformation of Freud

In *Seminar III*, Lacan appropriates, reformulates, and contrasts the Freudian terms *Bejahung* and *Verwerfung* in order to theorise the phenomenon of psychosis in light of the lessons of structural linguistics.⁸⁴⁹ Relevant, in the present context, is, firstly, Lacan's characterisation of a 'pure, primitive *Bejahung*' as 'primitive symbolization' and, by way of elucidating the 'mechanism' of psychotic phenomena, his suggestion that 'In the beginning, then, there is either *Bejahung*, which is the affirmation of what is, or *Verwerfung*.'⁸⁵⁰ To this extent, *Bejahung* and *Verwerfung* are presented as opposing functions, operating on the same 'primitive' level. Secondly, with reference to Freud's 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis', Lacan identifies 'a phenomenon of exclusion for which the term *Verwerfung* appears valid'.⁸⁵¹ On this basis, Lacan proposes that 'it happens that whatever is refused in the symbolic order, in the sense of *Verwerfung*, reappears in the real'⁸⁵² and, similarly,

⁸⁴⁹ Indeed, whilst Lacan does not mention this explicitly in *Seminar III*, a source of inspiration would appear to be Freud, 'The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence' (1894) in SE, v3, 58. Here, Freud makes reference to

...a much more energetic and successful kind of defence... [where] the ego rejects the incompatible idea together with its affect and behaves as if the idea had never occurred to the ego at all. *But from the moment at which this has been successfully done the subject is in a psychosis, which can only be classified as 'hallucinatory confusion'.*

That is to say, the term *Verwerfung* is associated with the condition of psychosis fomented by the radical rejection of an idea.

⁸⁵⁰ Lacan, *Seminar III*, 82. For further references to the meaning of *Bejahung*, see, for example, Žižek, *Less Than Nothing, Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 860-61, where it is suggested that *Bejahung* is 'the primordial gesture of subjectively assuming one's place in the symbolic universe'. See also Evans, 17, where it is suggested that '*Bejahung* denotes... the primordial act of symbolisation itself, the inclusion of something in the symbolic universe.'

⁸⁵¹ Lacan, *Seminar III*, 12.

⁸⁵² *Ibid*, 13.

In the subject's relationship to the symbol there is a possibility of a primitive *Verwerfung*, that is, that something is not symbolized and is going to reappear in the real.⁸⁵³

In *Seminar III*, Lacan's employment of the term *Verwerfung* to characterise that which is fundamentally other than or excluded from the symbolic order recalls his commentary in *Seminar I* where, in the course of challenging the French translation of Freud's text, Lacan suggests that *Verwerfung* ought to be understood as a rejection or refusal *apart from* judgement *per se* (i.e., as 'outside' or 'beyond' the system of language-mediated subjectivity). Indeed, in *Seminar I*, Lacan seems to more or less identify *Verwerfung* with *Urverdrängung*, suggesting that the implication of Freud's employment of *Verwerfung*

...shows us that originally, for repression to be possible, there must be a beyond of repression, something final, already primitively constituted, an initial nucleus of the repressed, which not only is unacknowledged, but which, for not being formulated, is literally as if it didn't exist... And nevertheless, in a certain sense, it is somewhere, since, as Freud everywhere tells us, it is the centre of attraction, calling up all the subsequent repressions.⁸⁵⁴

Returning to *Seminar III*, Lacan makes two other critical suggestions with reference to Freud's 'Negation' (where, it should be noted, Freud employs the term *Ausstossung*, as opposed to *Verwerfung*). Firstly, Lacan proposes that, in addition to conceiving of the unconscious in terms of that which is repressed/returning (i.e., *Verdrängung*) – it is also necessary to posit 'a primordial *Bejahung*, an admission in the sense of the symbolic,

⁸⁵³ Ibid, 81. Here, it should be reiterated that Lacan's reference to the real as a place in which an entity may be banished ought to be taken figuratively as opposed to literally. More precisely, one might say that, as a matter of logical and structural necessity, the field of language-mediated subjectivity and subjective desire precipitates as a counterpoise between possibility and impossibility such that the signifying chain is constituted with a *caput mortuum* – i.e., unresolvable and irreducible structural deficits, *aporiae*, impossibilities.

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid, *Seminar I*, 43. In the course of challenging the French translation of Freud's text, Lacan, firstly, reproduces Freud's comment distinguishing a 'repression' from a 'condemning judgement' in the original German ('*Eine Verdrängung ist etwas anderes als eine Verwerfung*') in order to justify the interpretation of *Verwerfung* as a rejection or refusal *apart from* judgement *per se*. Secondly, Lacan points out that Freud only introduces the term judgement (*Urteil*) precisely in order to emphasise that, in the context of *Verwerfung*-as-rejection, 'there isn't any. No judgement has been brought to bear on the existence of the problem of castration – *Aber etwas so*, but it was the same, *als ob sie nicht*, as if it didn't exist.'

which can itself be wanting' (i.e., a primordial admission of a signifier of lack: S(A)).⁸⁵⁵ Secondly, affirming that it is 'structurally necessary to admit a primitive stage in which the world of signifiers as such appears,' Lacan proposes that it is in the 'field of symbolic articulation', necessarily grounded in 'a primitive appearance of the signifier', that '*Verwerfung* occurs.'⁸⁵⁶ Subsequently, Lacan asserts that

What is at issue when I speak of *Verwerfung*... is the rejection of a primordial signifier into the outer shadows, a signifier that will henceforth be missing at this level... It's a matter of a primordial process of exclusion of an original within, which is not a bodily within but that of an initial body of signifiers.⁸⁵⁷

In making these assertions, Lacan appeals to Jean Hyppolite's 'A spoken commentary on Freud's *Verneinung*' (1954) (originally delivered in the context of Lacan's seminar of 1953 and 1954).⁸⁵⁸ Here, Hyppolite contends that a basic insight of Freud's essay is that judgement, intellection, the functioning of the unconscious – in short, language-mediated subjectivity *per se* – is made possible by a fundamental rejection or expulsion (i.e., *Verwerfung/Ausstossung*) synonymous with what Freud refers to as 'the creation of a symbol of negation.'⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid, *Seminar III*, 12.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid, 149.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid, 150.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid, 12, n9. For references to Hyppolite's commentary, see Jean Hyppolite, 'A spoken commentary on Freud's *Verneinung*' in Lacan, *Seminar I* (Hyppolite's commentary originally presented 10 February 1954 in Lacan's *Seminar* of 1953-54 and originally published as 'Commentaire parlée sur la *Verneinung* de Freud' in *La Psychanalyse*, n1, 1956, 29-40), 289-97. In my quotes, I use the more recent translation presented in *Écrits* (2006), 746-54.

⁸⁵⁹ Thus, in Hyppolite, 749, it is affirmed that Freud's essay seeks to show 'how the intellectual separates <in action> from the affective, and to give a formulation of a sort of genesis of judgment, that is, in short, a genesis of thought'. With regard to the former point, however, Hyppolite insists that the 'role' Freud attributes to 'primordial affectivity insofar as it gives rise to intelligence' (ibid) should be conceived in Lacanian terms:

...the primal form of relation known psychologically as the affective is itself situated within the distinctive field of the human situation, and that, whilst it gives rise to intelligence, it is because, from the outset, it already brings with it a fundamental historicity. (750)

Notwithstanding the various ambiguities arising from Lacan's reformulation of Freud's ideas (in particular, the subsuming of Freud's *Ausstossung* into *Verwerfung*), I would suggest that there appears to obtain a logico-structural equivalence between the function of *Urverdrängung*, the creation of the symbol of negation, the 'pure, primitive *Bejahung*' that facilitates an 'admission in the sense of the symbolic, which can itself be wanting' (i.e., the admission of the signifier of lack $S(A)$), and the 'primitive *Verwerfung*' that involves 'the rejection of a primordial signifier' or a 'primordial process of exclusion of an original... body of signifiers... into the real'. Moreover (as noted in chapter four), given Lacan's insistence that the primordial signifier or primordial object of desire (and thus the primordial moment of the precipitation of subjectivity) is *mythical*, it should be apparent that it makes no sense to ask whether these primordial admissions and exclusions occur in relation to a *pre-existing* symbolic order or whether they are

Whilst Hyppolite does not state this explicitly, I take him to be implying that there is no clear division between the (pre-symbolic) domain of 'primordial affectivity' and the (post-symbolic) domain of intellection. Indeed, insofar as it is 'situated within the distinctive field of the human situation', wherein, 'from the outset, it already brings with it a fundamental historicity', always already, what is called 'primordial affectivity' is structured and law-governed in a way that demands to be conceived of in terms of language. To recall the discussion in section 2.2, Hyppolite's position is equivalent to Lacan's repudiation of the distinction Freud sustains between 'word-presentations' or *Wortvorstellungen* and 'thing-presentations' or *Sachevorstellungen* such that, in the field of human subjectivity, it makes no sense to speak of a primordial realm of pure forms entirely divorced from meaning. It is in this light that one may understand Hyppolite's affirmation that 'There is no pure affect on the one hand, entirely engaged in the real, and pure intellect on the other, which detaches itself from it in order to grasp it anew' (ibid), and his contention that, in Freud's speculations on the genesis of judgement, intellection, and subjectivity, all references to the primordial status or advent of subjectivity have the status of 'grand myths' (750, 751, 752).

With regard to Freud's suggestion that 'the performance of the function of judgement' is enabled by 'the creation of the symbol of negation', Hyppolite proposes that negation, thus conceived, is to be identified with neither 'a tendency towards destruction' (i.e., negation = the death instinct) nor that which operates 'within a form of judgement' (i.e., negation = a tacit admission within the very form of a denial). Rather, negation, in this context, is to be thought as 'the form of destruction' that bears witness to 'a concrete attitude at the origin of the explicit symbol of negation [*négation*]', where 'this explicit symbol alone makes possible something like the use of the unconscious, all the while maintaining the repression' (752-53). As noted in Julia Kristeva, *Melanie Klein*, trans Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, originally published as *Le Génie féminin: la vie, la folie, les mots* (v2): *Mélanie Klein* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 2000)), 173, by 'concrete attitude at the origin of the explicit symbol of negation', Hyppolite means the fundamental rejection/expulsion, *Verwerfung/Ausstossung* involved in the creation of the symbol of negation.

coincident with the *emergence* of such. To all intents and purposes, the primordial admission of a signifier of lack, the exclusion of a primordial signifier, and the ‘advent’ of the symbolic order *as* constitutively lacking are logically and structurally synonymous.

8.8.3 Žižek’s transformation of Lacan

Support for the interpretation of Lacanian theory given above may be found in Žižek’s *Less Than Nothing* (2012), where, it may be noted, in making sense of Lacan’s transformations of Freud, Žižek reconfigures Lacan’s terminology in turn. Intrinsic to Žižek’s ‘resolution’ of the ambiguities arising in relation to Lacan’s transformation of Freud is that the exclusions or expulsions proper to *Ausstossung* and *Verwerfung* are considered to be functionally distinct *and* structurally synonymous. How is this so? In the first place, Žižek attributes the ‘ambiguous relation between *Ausstossung*... and *Verwerfung*... in Freud and Lacan’ to the fact that Lacanian psychoanalysis, reading Freud via Hegel, complicates the idea that subjectivity is conceivable in terms of a tension between two discrete or determinate entities or domains (e.g., in terms of ‘the gap between the system cs/pcs and the unconscious’ or as ‘the separation of the I from the unconscious Substance’). Rather, the process of ‘de-centering’ by which Lacanian subjectivity emerges is ‘always redoubled’ so that

...the Other, the de-centered site of the subject’s being, is also in its turn de-centered, truncated, deprived of the unfathomable X that would guarantee its consistency. In other words, when the subject is de-centered, the core of its being is not the natural Substance, but the “big Other”... the virtual symbolic order which is itself constructed around a lack. The gap that separates the subject from the big Other is thus simultaneously the gap in the heart of the Other itself.⁸⁶⁰

To reiterate points made in chapter four, this is to affirm that (1) ‘man’s desire is the Other’s desire’ (where the Other in question is the big Other – the ‘locus of the word’) *and* (2) ‘Desire is a relation to lack... [to the] lack of being whereby the being exists’. Hence, the ‘lack of being’ proper to subjective desire is not only that of the individual subject but also of the transindividual Otherness by which is defined the language-

⁸⁶⁰ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 860.

mediated field of subjectivity. In consequence, it is not only the individual but also the big Other that is constitutively lacking.

On the basis of their difference, Žižek proposes that *Ausstossung* designates ‘the expulsion of the Real, which is constitutive of the emergence of the symbolic order’, whilst *Verwerfung* defines ‘the “foreclosure” of a signifier from the symbolic into the Real’.⁸⁶¹ To this extent, *Ausstossung* would seem synonymous with *Urverdrängung*, whilst *Verwerfung*, in common with *Verdrängung*, ‘presuppose[s] that the symbolic order is in place, since they deal with how some content relates to it’.⁸⁶² However, whilst sustaining a distinction between *Ausstossung* and *Verwerfung*, Žižek also contends that they operate on the same level (i.e., they are functionally distinct but structurally synonymous). In Žižek’s view, this reflects

...the basic paradox of the symbolic as *the two at the same*: ultimately, the expulsion of the Real from the symbolic and the rejection of a signifier overlap... the symbolic order can only emerge as delimited from the Real if it is delimited from itself, missing or excluding a central part of itself, not identical with itself. There is no *Ausstossung* without a *Verwerfung* – the price the symbolic has to pay in order to delimit itself from the Real is its own being-truncated.⁸⁶³

Expressed in the terminology thus far employed, this is equivalent to the understanding that the symbolic order or the field of language-mediated subjectivity coalesces (1) in the form of a structurally necessary counterpoise between possibility (i.e., the tension between the conscious and the unconscious dimensions of the signifying chain) and impossibility (i.e., the real as *caput mortuum* of the signifying chain), and (2) by virtue of the self-effacing function of pure difference – a ‘real writing’ or ‘writing in the real’ that is the structurally necessary, real-as-impossibility synonymous with, yet inassimilable to, the function of representation/symbolisation. As Žižek goes on to point out, the missing primordial signifier, by virtue of which the field of language-mediated

⁸⁶¹ Ibid.

⁸⁶² Ibid, 859.

⁸⁶³ Ibid, 863.

subjectivity is constitutively lacking, is 'a signifier that itself stands for the... lack of signifier, for the incompleteness-inconsistency of the symbolic field.'⁸⁶⁴ As noted in chapter four, in Lacanian theory, this 'signifier' (which, to reiterate, is *not* an 'entity' in the singular) is termed, 'S(\bar{A})' (i.e., signifier of a lack in the Other) or, more controversially, the 'phallus'.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid.

8.9 Tracing *Malady* series acrylic paintings on canvas from 1970

8.9.1 Numbered and/or lettered works

Black Painting I from “*Malady*” (1970)

John Furphy, *Australian Art Sales Digest*, <http://www.aasd.com.au/index.cfm/search-title/?q=black+painting+I+from+malady&Submit=Search+for+Title&qw=&house=&medium=0&sold=2&lo=&hi=&loe=&hie=&height=&width=&loy=&hiy>, (12.06.14). Identified as ‘*Black Painting I* from *Malady*, a Poem by Bill Manhire’. Description: ‘Acrylic on canvas, signed, titled and dated 1970 on reverse, 177 x 71 cm’.

Black Painting II from “*Malady*” (1970)

Furphy, <http://www.aasd.com.au/index.cfm/search-title/?q=black+painting+II+from+malady&Submit=Search+for+Title&qw=&house=&medium=0&sold=2&lo=&hi=&loe=&hie=&height=&width=&loy=&hiy>, (12.06.14). Identified as ‘*Black Painting II*, from the *Malady (Melody)*, a Poem by Bill Manhire’ and described as ‘Oil and acrylic on canvas, signed, inscribed and dated ‘Dunedin’ 1970 verso, 178 x 71 cm’. This reproduction may be heavily overexposed to the blue (if it is not then one would question why it merits the designation *Black Painting*). There is a separate listing of what may be the same painting, only reproduced in more natural hues: <http://www.aasd.com.au/index.cfm/search-title/?q=black+painting+II&Submit=Search+for+Title&qw=&house=&medium=0&sold=2&lo=&hi=&loe=&hie=&height=&width=&loy=&hiy>, (12.06.14). Identified as ‘*Black Painting II*’. Description: ‘From the Melody series, oil and acrylic on canvas, inscribed Melody numerously on the face; inscribed Black Painting II from Malady, a poem by Bill Manhire, signed and dated Dunedin 1970 verso’.

W.L. Renwick, *Emblems of Identity, Painting, Carving and Maori-Pakeha Understanding* (Wellington: Visual Production Unit, Department of Education, 1987, kit

comprising a booklet, a video, and a selection of 214 slides), 34, slide 172. Identified as '*Malady series*'. Date: 1970. Description: (possibly erroneous) '1829x914'.

Black Painting III from "Malady" (1970) (Te Manawa Museum of Art, Science and History, Palmerston North)

Email correspondence between the author and Jeff Fox (Te Manawa, Senior Curator), Susanna Shadbolt (Te Manawa, Assistant Curator), and Rebekah Clements (Te Manawa, Registrar), 28 November 2013). Identified as '**70/3: Black Painting: From 'Malady', a poem by Bill Manhire**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'Inscribed on verso of canvas, in brush and black paint: "Black Painting III / from Malady / a poem by / Bill Manhire" and "Hotere, Dunedin '70" ' and 'dye and acrylic on canvas, H 1800 W 1240mm'.

Black Painting IIIa from "Malady" (1970) (Te Manawa Museum of Art, Science and History, Palmerston North)

Email correspondence between the author and Jeff Fox (Te Manawa, Senior Curator), Susanna Shadbolt (Te Manawa, Assistant Curator), and Rebekah Clements (Te Manawa, Registrar), 28 November 2013). Identified as '**87/47: Black Painting III: From 'Malady', a poem by Bill Manhire**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'On verso of canvas, in brush and black paint: "Black Painting IIIa / from MALADY / A poem by / Bill Manhire" and "Hotere, Dunedin '70" ' and 'acrylic on canvas, H 1681 W 1376mm'.

Renwick, 34, slide 173. Identified as '*Malady series*'. Date: 1970. Description: (confirmed incorrect) '1174x1219'.

Black Painting V from "Malady" (1970)

PageBlackie Gallery, Wellington, <http://www.pageblackiegallery.co.nz/artists/ralph-hotere/>, (13.12.13). Identified as 'Black Painting V [From...'. Description: Acrylic on canvas – signed and dated on verso 1770 x 710 mm'.

Waikato Art Gallery Bulletin 4, Ralph Hotere (Hamilton: Waikato Art Gallery, 1973), np. Identified as '**Black Painting V** 1970 From **Malady** – A poem by Bill Manhire'. Description: 'Acrylic on Canvas 70 x 28'.

Black Painting VI from "Malady" (1970)

Art+Object art auctioneers, Auckland,
<http://www.artandobject.co.nz/catalogue/50/important-paintings-and-contemporary-art#large/18353>, (13.12.13). Identified as 'Black Painting VI'. Description: 'acrylic on canvas, title inscribed, signed and dated Dunedin 70 and inscribed from Malady, a poem by Bill Manhire, 1780x710'.

Furphy,
http://www.aasd.com.au/subscribers/list_all_works.cfm?concat=hotereralph&order=1&st art=151&show=50, (29.11.13). Identified as '*Black Painting VI*'. Description: 'Acrylic on canvas, title inscribed, signed and dated Dunedin '70 and inscribed from Malady, a poem by Bill Manhire, 178 x 71 cm'.

Black Painting VIII from "Malady" (1970) (Dunedin Public Art Gallery).

Dunedin Public Art Gallery,
<http://collection.dunedin.art.museum/search.do?id=28226&db=object&page=1&view=detail>, (13.12.13). No image available, but work identified as '**Black Painting VIII: from Malady a poem by Bill Manhire**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'acrylic on canvas, 1780 x 710 mm, 33-1982'.

Renwick, 34, slide 171. Identified as '*Black Painting VIII*'. Date: 1970. Description: '1780x710'.

Black Painting XI from "Malady" (1970)

Ralph Hotere, Kriselle Baker and Vincent O'Sullivan, *Ralph Hotere* (Auckland: Ron Sang Publications, 2008), 52. Identified as '**BLACK PAINTING XI FROM "MALADY"**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'acrylic on canvas, 1795 x 935'.

Dunedin Public Art Gallery, *Ralph Hotere, A survey 1963-73*, exh. cat. (Dunedin: Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 1974), np. Identified as '**BLACK PAINTING XI from Malady a poem by Bill Manhire**'. Date: 1970. Description 'acrylic on canvas, 177.2 x 91.2'.

Waikato Art Gallery Bulletin 4, Ralph Hotere, np. Work is pictured in the company of an abstract sculpture by Marte Szirmay. Captions and descriptions between two *Malady* series paintings (the latter an un-numbered painting in the 70x28in format with a column of MALADYs to the left of its picture space) are muddled. However, piecing together the information in the most rational manner yields the identification '**Black Painting XI 1970 from Malady – a poem by Bill Manhire**' and the description 'Acrylic on Canvas 70 x 36'.

Black Painting XII from "Malady" (1970) (Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago)

Our Heritage, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago, <http://otago.ourheritage.ac.nz/items/show/5422>, (13.12.13). Identified as '**Black Painting XII from "Malady", a poem by Bill Manhire**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'Verso upper left (u.l.) with brush: Black Painting XII from "Malady", a poem by Bill Manhire, Dunedin 70', 'Hocken Pictorial Collections – 73/279, a5254', '1775 x 915 mm'.

Ralph Hotere (2008), 55. Identified as '**BLACK PAINTING XII from "MALADY"**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'acrylic on canvas, 1775 x 915'.

Black Painting XIIB from "Malady" (1970)

Furphy, <http://www.aasd.com.au/index.cfm/search-title/?q=black+painting+XIIB&Submit=Search+for+Title&qw=&house=&medium=0&sold=2&lo=&hi=&loe=&hie=&height=&width=&loy=&hiy> , (12.06.14). Identified as '*Black Painting XIIB from Malady*'. Description: 'Acrylic on canvas, title inscribed, signed and dated Hotere '70, Dunedin verso, 178 x 91.5 cm'.

Ralph Hotere (2008), 57. Identified as '**BLACK PAINTING XIIB FROM "MALADY"**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'acrylic on canvas, 1775 x 915'.

Black Painting XIII from "Malady" (1970) (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa)

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/objectdetails.aspx?irn=38756&term=hotere>, (13.12.13). Identified as 'Black Painting XIII, from 'Malady' a poem by Bill Manhire'. Date: 1970. Description: 'acrylic on canvas', '1776 (Height) x 914 (Length) x mm', '1971-0024-1'.

Black Painting XIV from "Malady" (1970)

Ralph Hotere (2008), 53. Identified as '**BLACK PAINTING XIV FROM "MALADY"**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'acrylic on canvas, 1780 x 915'.

Black Painting XV from "Malady" (1970) (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa)

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/Search.aspx?page=2&term=hotere>, (13.12.13). Identified as 'Black Painting XV, from 'Malady' a poem by Bill Manhire'. Date: 1970. Description: 'acrylic on canvas', '1777 (Height) x 915 (Width) x mm', '1971-0024-2'.

Ralph Hotere (2008), 54. Identified as '**BLACK PAINTING XV FROM "MALADY"**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'acrylic on canvas, 1777 x 915'.

Black Painting XVII from "Malady" (1970)

Ralph Hotere (2008), 56. Identified as '**BLACK PAINTING XVII FROM "MALADY"**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'acrylic on canvas, 1780 x 915'.

Ralph Hotere, A survey 1963-73, np. Identified as '**BLACK PAINTING XVII from Malady a poem by Bill Manhire**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'acrylic on canvas, 177.5 x 91.4'.

8.9.2 Un-numbered and/or un-lettered works

Painting from "Malady" (1970) (Jennifer Gibbs Trust Collection)

Ralph Hotere (2008), 60. Identified as '**PAINTING FROM "MALADY"**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'acrylic on canvas, 1116 x 912'.

David Eggleton, 'From Absence to Presence' in Dunedin Public Art Gallery and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongawera, *Ralph Hotere: Black Light, Major works including collaborations with Bill Culbert*, exh. cat. (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2000), 60. Identified as '*Painting from "Malady" – A Poem by Bill Manhire*'. Date: 1969-70. Description: 'acrylic on canvas, 1116 x 912 mm'.

Gregory O'Brien, *Hotere, Out The Black Window, Ralph Hotere's work with New Zealand poets* (Auckland: Godwit Publishing, 1997), 34. Identified as 'Malady'. Date: 1970. Description: 'ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 1116 x 912mm'.

Black Painting from "Malady" (1970) (Dowse Art Museum)

As noted in chapter four, email correspondence between the author and Georgia Morgan (Registrar, Dowse Art Museum), 29 November 2013, confirms that, whilst the 'title, signature and date are present on the verso' 'There is no numbering on the painting'. The dimensions are given as 'H2115 x W740mm'.

Ralph Hotere (2008), 59. Identified as '**BLACK PAINTING FROM "MALADY"**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'acrylic on canvas, 2118 x 743'.

Black Painting from "Malady" (1970)

Ralph Hotere (2008), 58. Identified as '**BLACK PAINTING FROM "MALADY"**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'acrylic on canvas, 1800 x 730'.

Black Painting from "Malady" (1970)

Waikato Art Gallery Bulletin 4, Ralph Hotere, np. Please note, this is the aforementioned work distinguished by a column of MALADYs disposed to the left of the picture space. The captioning is muddled, but evidently identifies a '**Black Painting** 1970 From **Malady** – A poem by Bill Manhire', further describing this painting as 'Acrylic and Oil, 70 x 28'.

Black Painting from "Malady" (1970)

Ralph Hotere, A survey 1963-73, np. Identified as '**BLACK PAINTING from Malady a poem by Bill Manhire**'. Date: 1970. Description: 'acrylic on canvas, 178.1 x 91.2'. Whilst this painting lacks a numerical identifier, it is characterised as '*First exhibited Barry Lett Galleries, 1970*'. Hence, if the documentation in the Barry Lett Galleries pamphlet accompanying this show is correct then this work would have to be *XIIB, XVI, or XVIII*.

8.9.3 No data

Numbers *IV, VII, IX, X, XVI, XVIII.*

8.10 Evaluating Hotere's 'institutional neglect'

By way of evaluating Mane-Wheoki's claim, in 'Hotere – out the black window' that Hotere has suffered a 'scandalous... institutional neglect', *Ralph Hotere, A survey 1963-73* (1974-75) is a good place to begin. Here, it may be noted that, as Mane-Wheoki observes, it is certainly the case that damage sustained by forty one of the sixty three works included led to the 'abandonment' of the touring show. Whilst this unfortunate happenstance speaks volumes about the paucity of resources and lack of professionalism afflicting some sectors of the New Zealand arts establishment in the mid 1970s, it also should be noted that the cancellation of Hotere's touring exhibition affected only its tenth and final destination – Auckland City Art Gallery (admittedly, a lamentable exclusion from a key venue located in New Zealand's most populous city).⁸⁶⁵ In support of the idea that, subsequently, Hotere suffered institutional indifference in New Zealand, Mane-Wheoki furnishes only two examples of group exhibitions from which Hotere was absent: *Content/Context: a survey of recent New Zealand art 1986* (1986) and *Art Now: the first biennial review of contemporary art* (1994).⁸⁶⁶ Whilst these were, indeed, significant undertakings, I would suggest that the significance of Hotere's omission from these exhibitions is difficult to assess in any objective fashion. Moreover, even *had* Hotere's

⁸⁶⁵ For a reference to the damage sustained by Hotere's work during the national tour of *Ralph Hotere, A survey 1963-73* and the consequent cancellation of the final showing in Auckland, see, for example, anon, 'Art damage robs city of exhibition', *Auckland Star*, City Edition, 6 February 1975, 1 (no pagination). Here, the Dunedin Public Art Gallery director Les Lloyd is reported as being 'very disturbed about the whole business of inexperienced art gallery staff and helpers handling art works.' The article also paraphrases the assessment of Auckland City Art Gallery director E.W. Smith, in whose opinion '41 of the 63 paintings... [were] so extensively damaged that it would not be fair to the artist to stage the exhibition in Auckland from February 14 to March 6 as planned.' It is also reported that 'the exhibition... has been to about 10 galleries on its tour.' See also anon, 'Works of art damaged', *Evening Star*, 7 February 1975, 2. This reiterates that 'Due to mishandling, 41 works of art by Dunedin artist Ralph Hotere have suffered extensive damage while touring the country' and also notes that 'The works have been on tour for a year, and until they reached Auckland, had been to every main centre. Auckland was the last port of call before the exhibition would return to its owners.' For a reference to the itinerary of the exhibition, see 'Itinerary' in Dunedin Public Art Gallery, *Ralph Hotere, A survey 1963-73* – although, here, it should be noted, Auckland City Art Gallery is listed eighth rather than tenth.

⁸⁶⁶ Mane-Wheoki, 'Hotere – out the black window', 233-34.

work been featured, it is unclear whether, from Mane-Wheoki's perspective, this would have amounted to anything more than 'inclusion in the odd survey exhibition.'⁸⁶⁷

Notwithstanding the absence of any institutional gesture of a magnitude sufficient to satisfy Mane-Wheoki's expectations, it should be acknowledged that, between the touring shows of 1974-75 and 1997-98, Hotere's work did, in fact, receive regular and substantial public recognition and support. This took the form of (1) inclusion in prestigious group exhibitions and the presentation of at least one significant solo exhibition by a major, New Zealand, public arts institution, (2) works acquired by public collections, (3) articles published in the most widely read, national publication devoted to the arts in this period: *Art New Zealand*. Let us, briefly, address each of these categories in turn. In relation to the first point, it may be noted that Hotere's work was included in prestigious, group exhibitions such as *Fifth Sydney Biennale* (1984) and *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art* (1992-93) – both of which presented Hotere's work in an international (or, at least, Australasian) context.⁸⁶⁸ In relation to the second point, it is apparent that many of

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid, 233. For an indication of the scale of the exhibitions in question, see Luit Bieringa, Jim Barr, Mary Barr, and Judi Brierley, *Content/Context: a survey of recent New Zealand art 1986*, exh. cat. (Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1986), where there are listed forty six artists working in the fields of painting, sculpture, photography, and installation art, and a further fourteen artists or groups of artist working in the field of video and film. Similarly, in Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, *Art Now: the first biennial review of contemporary art*, exh. cat. (Wellington, 1994), there are surveyed thirty three artists working in the areas of sculpture and installation art.

⁸⁶⁸ In the former case, as noted in Art Gallery of New South Wales, *The Fifth Biennale of Sydney, Private Symbol: Social Metaphor*, exh. cat. (Sydney: Biennale of Sydney Ltd., 1984), np, Hotere exhibited the, aforementioned, ten piece work *Aramoana* and *Black Window Towards Aramoana* (1983, ref. 108) – an installation comprising eight of Hotere's works utilising recycled, wooden window frames of various dimensions. In the latter case, as noted in Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art*, exh. cat. (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1992), 222, in collaboration with Bill Culbert, Hotere exhibited *Pathway to the sea – Aramoana* (1991, ref. 109) (an installation utilising paua shells, rocks, and fluorescent lights) and *P.R.O.P.* (1991, ref. 110) (a sculptural piece incorporating lacquer on corrugated and fluorescent tubes). In addition to these large-scale group exhibitions, as noted in Dunedin Public Art Gallery, *Hotere's Hoteres*, exh. cat. (Dunedin: Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 1985), np, Dunedin Public Art Gallery presented an exhibition of fifty six of Hotere's works, 28 January – 24 April 1985 (including the public debut of the large-scale sculpture *Black Phoenix* (1984-88, ref. 111)). According to Kerr and Trewby, 119, 121, *Hotere's Hoteres* initially comprised a selection of 'Forty paintings and drawings from the artist's private collection', exhibited at Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin, 6-17 April 1981. Re-named *Hotere's Hoteres 1961-*

the aforementioned works were acquired by New Zealand public arts collections prior to the launch of *Hotere – out the black window*.⁸⁶⁹ With regard to the third and final point, substantial pieces on Hotere appeared in *Art New Zealand* on several occasions in the 1980s and 1990s.⁸⁷⁰

1984, a similar selection of work was exhibited at the Centre Gallery, Hamilton, 1-31 October 1984.

⁸⁶⁹ Thus, as noted on the website of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, <http://www.aucklandartgallery.com/the-collection/browse-artwork/6514/aramoana>, (13.06.14), *Aramoana* was gifted by the Transfield Corporation in 1985. Similarly, on the website of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/Object/37093>, (13.06.14), it is stated that *Black Phoenix* was purchased in 1988, whilst in, *ibid*, <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/Object/41267>, (13.06.14), it is mentioned that *Pathway to the sea – Aramoana* was purchased in 1993. Still further, as noted on the website of Dunedin Public Art Gallery, <http://collection.dunedin.art.museum/search.do?id=29610&db=object&page=1&view=detail>, (13.06.14), *P.R.O.P.* was purchased in 1991.

⁸⁷⁰ See, for example, Leech, 'Style and Change', and Janet Paul, 'Ralph Hotere's *Baby Iron*', *Art New Zealand*, n29, Summer 1983-84, 22-23. See also Brown, 'Ralph Hotere', *Art New Zealand*, n34, Autumn 1985, 28-31, 63, Louise Wilton, 'Ralph Hotere at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery', *Art New Zealand*, n35, Winter 1985, 24 (a review of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery exhibition *Hotere's Hoteres*), Kate Darrow, 'No 8, Ralph Hotere at RKS Art', *Art New Zealand*, n63, Winter 1992, 46-47), and Eggleton, 'Ralph Hotere, Shadowing the Sublime', *Art New Zealand*, n81, Summer 1996-97, 68-73. In addition to the articles listed above, Hotere was also mentioned in at least two *Art New Zealand* pieces addressing group shows featuring contemporary, Māori artists: Panoho, 'Haongia Te Taonga', *Art New Zealand*, n40, Spring 1986, 31-33, 82, and Mane-Wheoki, 'Korurangi/Toihoukura, Brown Art in White Spaces', *Art New Zealand*, n78, Autumn 1996, 43-47.

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